War Diary of Bernard Reid, January - July 1943

Transcribed and annotated by Matthew Reid (2025), with assistance from Google Gemini 3.0.

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About Bernard

Bernard Reid was born in 1917 in St Helens, Lancashire to a coal-mining family. He lived on his paternal grandparents' farm in County Mayo as a teenager, and enlisted for the British Army in 1936.

Bernard's regiment was the Grenadier Guards; and at the time of this diary he was in the 6th battalion.

His service number was 2614778.

Photo of Bernard, circa 1938. Colourised and restored by Google Gemini 3.0.

About this diary

It is a pocket-sized diary containing hand-written entries in pen and pencil. It was found in the possessions of Bernard Reid on his death in 2001, and it has remained in his family ever since.

About this transcription

This transcription is based on high-resolution scans taken in the mid 2010s for each double spread. I asked Google Gemini 3.0 to: transcribe each scan; provide a glossary of terms; and the wider context of its entries. I cross-referenced Gemini's output with known facts about the 6th battalion, and added any appropriate hyperlinks.

Glossary of military terms

- **Bn.:** Battalion.
- **Bde.: Brigade**
- **C.O.:** Commanding Officer. In the context of a Battalion, this would usually be a Lieutenant Colonel.
- **Coy:** Company.
- **Coy. Comm.: Company Commander**.
- **Graph:** Short for **Airgraph**. This was a World War II postal service designed to save weight on transport aircraft. Soldiers wrote on special forms which were then photographed onto microfilm. The film was flown to the UK, developed into small photographic prints, and delivered to the family. It allowed thousands of letters to be carried in a single bag.
- **Jerry:** Slang for **German**.
- **Kit:** General term for equipment, vehicles, or supplies.
- **Leagured:** (Often spelled **Laagered**). A term of South African/Dutch origin widely adopted by the British Army. It refers to parking the convoy vehicles in a defensive formation (usually a compact square or circle) for the night to protect against attack.
- **M.G.:** Machine Gun.
- **O.P.: Observation Post**. A forward position used to spot enemy movements and direct artillery fire.
- **Pl.: Platoon**.
- **Pl. Comdr.: Platoon Commander**.
- **P.T.:** Physical Training (exercise).
- **Recce:** Slang/Abbreviation for **Reconnaissance**. In this context, it involves going out in vehicles to scout terrain or enemy positions (simulated).

- **Rev / Reveille:** The signal (bugle call or pipes) given in the morning to wake the soldiers and start the duty day.
- **Scheme:** The standard British Army term for a training exercise or maneuver.

Glossary of people

- **Anthony** younger brother of Bernard
- **Captain Thorne** George Thorne, officer in charge of Bernard's company. Referred to as *A Thorne* in the battalion diary.
- **Iris** Reid neé Lacey, wife of John (Bernard's brother)
- **Jack Harrison** fellow sergeant in Bernard's company
- **John** older brother of Bernard, also serving in the army
- **Mother** Margaret Reid neé McHenry, based in Thorne near Doncaster
- **Kay** unknown relationship, possibly an old flame
- **Kathleen** and **Norah** sisters of Bernard
- **Ted Leake** unknown relationship, possibly friend
- **Terry** unknown relationship, possibly friend. Was based in Durban at the start of 1943.

Entries

Dedication - first page

Wishing you the best of luck for the coming year Bernard, and god speed home again - Iris.

Friday, January 1, 1943

Tough morning at field firing. Just about all in at the end. Up hill most of way.

Lecture in afternoon and gun cleaning.

Reading at night and bed about 10 P.M.

Glossary of Terms

- **Field firing:** A military training exercise involving the use of live ammunition against targets in a simulated combat environment, as opposed to shooting at static targets on a formal range.
- **All in:** A British idiom common in the mid-20th century meaning completely exhausted or physically spent.

- **Gun cleaning:** The mandatory maintenance of a soldier's rifle (likely a Lee-Enfield .303) to prevent rust and jamming, usually performed immediately after firing.

Historical Context

- **Training over Holidays:** The date is Friday, January 1, 1943 (New Year's Day). The entry highlights the urgency of the war effort at this stage; despite it being a major public holiday, training schedules were not relaxed. The soldier was subjected to a physically grueling day of live-fire drills rather than celebration.
- **The State of the War (Jan 1943):** At this point in World War II, the British Army was heavily engaged in North Africa (following the victory at El Alamein in late 1942). British soldiers were undergoing intensified training—including the "field firing" mentioned here—to prepare for these upcoming offensives and the eventual liberation of Europe.
- **Daily Life:** The entry captures the "hurry up and wait" nature of military service: intense physical exertion ("up hill most of way") followed by sedentary classroom learning ("lecture") and routine maintenance.

Saturday, January 2, 1943

Talk by C.O. about 'the future' & drill pde.

Sleep in afternoon, early tea and Coy. Guard at 4.30 P.M. not too bad.

slept from 1.30 A.M.

Sunday, January 3, 1943

Dismounted guard at Reveille.

Mass at Catana at 9.30. Confession & Communion.

To Damascus in afternoon. Saw 'Captains of the Clouds' at Roxy. Bought silver cigarette case.

Back about 10.30 P.M.

Mother's birthday.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Drill pde:** Drill Parade. Formal marching practice, essential for discipline in the Guards Division.

- **Coy. Guard:** Company Guard. A security duty where a specific Company is responsible for guarding the camp perimeter or key assets for a set period.
- **Dismounted guard:** To "dismount" guard is to finish the duty shift and stand down.
- **Catana:** A phonetic spelling of **Qatana**, a town south-west of Damascus, Syria. This was the site of a major British military camp during the war.
- **Roxy:** A cinema (movie theater) in Damascus.

Historical Context

Location: Qatana, Syria (near Damascus)

This entry provides definitive proof of the 6th Battalion's location in early January 1943. Before they were sent to the meat-grinder of the Mareth Line in Tunisia, the battalion was stationed in **Syria**.

- **The "Quiet" Before the Storm:** The 201st Guards Brigade was stationed in the Middle East (specifically Syria and Palestine) during the winter of 1942/43. Their role was to protect oilfields and supply routes.
- **Rest & Recreation:** these entries show a soldier in a non-combat zone. Bernard is able to go into the city (Damascus), watch a movie, and go shopping for luxuries like a silver cigarette case.
- **The Movie:** *"Captains of the Clouds"* was a 1942 Technicolor war film starring James Cagney as a Canadian bush pilot. It was a popular morale-boosting film at the time.
- **"Talk... about 'the future'":** This is significant. The C.O. was likely briefing the men that their time in pleasant garrison duty was coming to an end. Shortly after this, the battalion would begin the long overland move from Syria to North Africa to join the 8th Army for the final push against the Axis forces in Tunisia.

Monday, January 4, 1943

Out for recce. in trucks on scheme.

Letter from John, Terry, & Mother. Wrote to Terry.

Tuesday, January 5, 1943

All day scheme of Coy. in attack. Fizzed out about 4.P.M.

Dinner on return & early night.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Coy. in attack:** A specific drill where the entire Company practices offensive maneuvers, likely advancing on a target position.
- **Fizzed out:** Slang meaning the exercise petered out, ended gradually, or finished earlier/less intensely than expected.

Historical Context

Training for Mobile Warfare
The mention of going "out for recce in trucks" is significant. While the Grenadier Guards are infantry, the desert war in North Africa was highly mobile. Infantry often traveled in "Troop Carrying Vehicles" (TCVs) to keep up with tanks.

By January 1943, the British Army knew that the upcoming campaign in Tunisia would require complex coordination between infantry and transport. Bernard's unit (still stationed in Syria at this point) is practicing the specific skills needed to move a company of men across open ground efficiently before deploying for an attack.

Friday, January 8, 1943

Cleaning G 1098 kit in morning. Baths and pay in afternoon. L.S. 80.

Had two snaps from home.

Saturday, January 9, 1943

Left camp at 10.15 A.M. on leave for Beirut. Arrived there at 1.30 P.M.

Handed arms & ammo. in to M. Ps.

Walk round town & had first dance since Durban at "Mansours". Very good restaurant.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **G 1098 (G-1098):** This is a specific British Army form (Army Form G.1098). It refers to the **War Equipment Table**. "Cleaning G 1098 kit" means the soldiers were checking, cleaning, and verifying the specific equipment required for active warfare (mobilization). This is a strong indicator that the unit is preparing to move from garrison duty to the front lines.
- **L.S. 80: Lira Syrian** (or Lebanese-Syrian Lira). At this time, Syria and Lebanon used a currency pegged to the French franc, and later the British pound during the occupation. This was likely his pay or pocket money for his leave.

- **Snaps:** A common colloquialism for **photographs**.
- **M.Ps:** Military Police.
- **Durban:** A city in South Africa. Troop convoys sailing from Britain to the Middle East (via the Cape of Good Hope to avoid the U-boat infested Mediterranean) often stopped in Durban for supplies and shore leave.
- **"Mansours":** A reference to a specific venue in Beirut, likely the *Hotel Mansour* or a cabaret/restaurant of that name, which was a popular spot for Allied troops on leave.

Historical Context

Leave in "The Paris of the Middle East"
These entries offer a glimpse into the rhythm of military life: the sharp contrast between the drudgery of "kit cleaning" and the luxury of city leave.

- **Preparing to Move:** The reference to "G 1098" is the most militarily significant part of this text. It confirms that the "holiday" period in Syria is ending. The battalion is conducting a complete inventory check to ensure they are combat-ready for the long drive to Tunisia.
- **Beirut:** At this time, Beirut was under Allied occupation (Free French and British) following the defeat of Vichy French forces in 1941. It was a haven for troops stationed in the region, offering Western-style amenities, nightlife, and culture ("the first dance since Durban").
- **The Route to War:** The mention of **Durban** confirms the 6th Battalion's journey. They would have sailed from the UK, down the coast of Africa, stopped in South Africa (Durban/Cape Town), and then up the east coast to Suez. This was a journey of many weeks, and for a soldier to remember a dance in Durban highlights how long they had been away from "civilization" or the company of women.

Wednesday, January 6, 1943

Recce. in morning for defence.

Scheme started 2.30 P.M. In position and dug in. Freezing cold at night.

On recce. patrol. Chapman went over cliff in truck, but only suffered from shock.

Thursday, January 7, 1943

Back off stunt about five a.m. Short sleep and good wash & shave. Breakfast. nothing on for rest of morning.

Lecture by naval officer on subs. in "Med".

Wrote to Mother & Iris. Bed 7.20.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Dug in:** The act of digging trenches or foxholes (slit trenches) to provide cover from enemy fire.
- **Stunt:** A common British soldier's slang term for a specific operation, raid, or training exercise. In this context, it refers to the overnight defensive scheme.
- **Subs in "Med": Submarines in the Mediterranean Sea**.
- **Shock:** In this era, this could refer to medical shock (circulatory failure) or, more colloquially, being severely shaken up and traumatized by an accident without sustaining major physical fractures.

Historical Context

The Hazards of Training & The War at Sea

- **Non-Combat Casualties:** The entry about "Chapman" going over a cliff in a truck highlights the inherent dangers of military training, often as lethal as combat itself. The terrain in Syria (where the battalion was stationed) is mountainous and rugged. Driving heavy military trucks, likely without headlights (to simulate blackout/tactical conditions) on narrow mountain tracks resulted in many accidents. It is fortunate Chapman survived; many did not in similar accidents.
- **Strategic Awareness:** The "lecture by naval officer on subs in 'Med'" is an interesting inclusion for an infantry battalion. It shows that the command was trying to keep the soldiers informed about the wider war effort. The battle for control of the Mediterranean supply lines was critical. The 8th Army in North Africa relied entirely on supplies brought by ship; if the U-boats (German submarines) sank the convoys, the infantry on the ground would starve or run out of ammunition.
- **Pre-Deployment Conditions:** The note "Freezing cold at night" reinforces the reality of the desert and semi-desert environment in winter. While days could be warm, nights in the Syrian hills (and later in Tunisia) often dropped below freezing, making "digging in" and sleeping in the open a miserable experience.
- **Family Connection:** Bernard again mentions writing to his **Mother** and **Iris** (his sister-in-law), maintaining the routine of correspondence that was vital for morale.

Sunday, January 10, 1943

Walk round docks in late morning.

Saw "Lucky Night" in afternoon.

To Mansour's in evening. All Russian and Greek dancing.

Monday, January 11, 1943

Had photo taken with Joe Chall. in Arab & Cassack dress.

Went through native market & bought two ivory bangles.

Saw "21 Days Together". Very good film.

In Olympic at night.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Cassack:** A misspelling of **Cossack**. The "Cossack" dress usually refers to the traditional uniform of cavalrymen from Southern Russia/Ukraine (tall fur hats, tunics with cartridge loops).
- **Joe Chall.:** fellow guardsman Joe Challinor.
- **Native market:** The local **souk** (bazaar) in Beirut.
- **Olympic:** probably a hotel (or possibly a cinema of the same name) in Beirut, which would have been a known establishment for servicemen.
- **"Lucky Night" (1939):** A romantic comedy starring Myrna Loy and Robert Taylor.
- **"21 Days Together" (1940):** A British drama film starring Vivien Leigh and Laurence Olivier.

Historical Context

Souvenirs from the "Paris of the Middle East"
These entries continue to document Bernard's leave in Beirut, providing a classic snapshot of the "soldier tourist" experience during WWII.

- **Dressing Up:** The mention of having a photo taken in "Arab & Cassack dress" was a very common cliché for soldiers stationed in the Middle East. Local photography studios kept props and costumes (fezzes, robes, fake weapons) specifically for troops to pose in to send exotic pictures home to their families. It was a moment of lighthearted play-acting before the seriousness of battle returned.
- **Cosmopolitan Beirut:** The reference to "Russian and Greek dancing" at Mansour's highlights the diverse cultural mix in Beirut at the time. The city was a hub for refugees fleeing the war in Europe, as well as a playground for Allied officers and soldiers.
- **Gifts for Home:** The "two ivory bangles" bought in the souk were almost certainly intended for the women in his life mentioned in the prompt—his sisters (Kathleen, Norah) or his sister-in-law Iris. Sending luxury goods like ivory, silk, or silver from the East back to ration-starved Britain was a common way for soldiers to show affection and support from afar.

Tuesday, January 12, 1943

Did nothing in morning.

Greek café, Mansour's at night. 3 bottles of best wine I ever tasted. Cocktail to finish off & had enough by 10.30.

Very sleepy.

Wednesday, January 13, 1943

Felt O.K. in morning. but Joe Chall. in bad way.

Walk to American University.

Saw "Philadelphia Story". Enjoyed it although I had seen it before.

Wrote to Terry in evening.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Joe Chall. in bad way:** "In a bad way" is a common British phrase for being unwell. In this specific context, following the "3 bottles of wine" and "cocktails" mentioned the night before, it means his friend was suffering from a severe hangover.
- **American University:** The **American University of Beirut (AUB)**. Established in 1866, its campus overlooks the Mediterranean Sea and is one of the most prestigious universities in the Middle East. It was a common sightseeing destination for soldiers on leave due to its beautiful grounds.
- **"Philadelphia Story" (1940):** A classic romantic comedy starring Cary Grant, Katharine Hepburn, and James Stewart.

Historical Context

The Hangover and the Sights of Beirut
These entries provide a very human look at the "R&R" (Rest and Recuperation) experience.

- **Blowing off Steam:** Tuesday's entry documents a heavy night of drinking ("3 bottles of best wine" plus cocktails). For soldiers knowing they were soon heading back to the austerity of the desert and the danger of the front lines, such binges were common. The quality of alcohol in Lebanon (due to French influence) was significantly better than the "plonk" or rationed beer available in the desert camps.
- **Recovery:** The following day shows the consequences, with his friend "Joe Chall." unable to function ("in a bad way"), while Bernard seems to have recovered enough to go sightseeing.

- **Cultural Exposure:** Walking to the American University shows that Bernard had an interest in the local landmarks beyond just the bars. Beirut in 1943 was a unique bubble of relative peace and high culture in the middle of a war zone, offering soldiers a brief return to a world of universities, cinemas, and fine wine before they returned to the 6th Battalion's camp to prepare for the move to Tunisia.

Thursday, January 14, 1943

Intended going for a swim, but too cold.

Saw "Adam Had Four Sons". Very good film.

French dance in evening, but style altogether different.

Friday, January 15, 1943

Wrote graph to Mother, Kathleen and Iris.

Collected photos. & had game of billiards. No pockets in table.

Saw "Arizona Wildcat".

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Billiards... No pockets in table:** Bernard is describing **Carom Billiards** (or French Billiards). Unlike the English Billiards or Snooker that a British soldier would be used to, French tables have no pockets; points are scored by rebounding the cue ball off the other balls and cushions.
- **"Adam Had Four Sons" (1941):** A romantic drama starring Ingrid Bergman and Warner Baxter.
- **"Arizona Wildcat" (1939):** A Western comedy starring Jane Withers.

Historical Context

French Influence in the Levant
These entries highlight the cultural differences Bernard encountered while on leave in Lebanon.

- **The French Connection:** Lebanon was a French Mandate territory. Even though it was under Allied military occupation in 1943, the culture remained heavily French. Bernard notes the "style altogether different" of the French dancing and is confused/bemused by the French style of billiards (Carom) which lacks the pockets found on British tables.
- **Winter in the Med:** The entry "Intended going for a swim, but too cold" reminds us that although the Middle East is associated with heat, January on the Mediterranean coast is

winter, and the water temperature would have been quite chilly (around 17°C/62°F)—too cold for a casual swim even for a soldier.
- **Collecting Memories:** When he mentions he "collected photos," he is picking up the prints from the session mentioned on Monday, Jan 11th (where he dressed up in "Arab & Cassack dress"). These photos would likely be enclosed in the next letter home, or kept in his wallet as a memento of the last peaceful days before the Tunisian campaign.

Saturday, January 16, 1943

Started back for camp about 10.30. By tram & hitch-hike.

Got to N.A.A.F.I. half-way by 3.15 P.M. after having come through mountain on top of native bus. Very cold and precarious.

Truck from camp took us home.

About nine letters from England.

Sunday, January 17, 1943

Mass at 9.30 A.M.

Sorted kit out after leave.

Bed in afternoon.

Was going to Benediction but no truck.

Wrote to John & posted Terry's letter.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **N.A.A.F.I. (Naafi):** An acronym for **Navy, Army and Air Force Institutes**. These were institutions created to provide canteens, shops, and recreational facilities for British military personnel. Finding a NAAFI meant finding tea, food, and cigarettes.
- **Hitch-hike:** Soldiers frequently relied on hitching rides with passing military convoys or civilian vehicles to get around when official transport wasn't laid on.
- **Native bus:** A term used by soldiers to refer to local civilian public transport. Riding "on top" of a bus through the mountains of Lebanon/Syria in January would indeed have been dangerous ("precarious") and freezing.
- **Benediction:** A service of the Roman Catholic Church (Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament), usually held in the late afternoon or evening.

Historical Context

The Journey Back to Reality
This entry marks the end of Bernard's leave in Beirut and his return to the routine of military life.

- **A Wild Ride:** The journey back to camp illustrates the ad-hoc nature of travel for soldiers in the Middle East. Combining a tram, hitch-hiking, and riding on the roof of a local bus through the mountains shows a degree of independence and adventure. The phrase "very cold and precarious" highlights the physical risks they took just to get back to base.
- **Morale from Home:** Receiving "nine letters from England" at once was a major event. Mail to the Middle East traveled via the long sea route around Africa (often taking months) or by the newer "Airgraph" system. Receiving a "bundle" like this meant a ship had likely just docked or a mail plane had arrived, bringing weeks' worth of news all at once.
- **Spiritual Routine:** Back in camp, Bernard immediately returns to his religious duties (Mass and attempted Benediction) and family obligations (writing to his brother John), grounding himself before the training resumes.

Monday, January 18, 1943

Casual day's waiting. Very easy day.

Letter from John and Terry.

Cooked supper in hut. Very nice.

Tuesday, January 19, 1943

Eighth Army & French column advance against Rommel. Made very good progress.

Siege at Stali-Leningrad is broken. & Russians advance on all fronts.

Handed book over to Brooke & went on mine lifting course.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Eighth Army:** The famous British field army commanded by General Bernard Montgomery, which had defeated the Axis at El Alamein and was chasing them across North Africa.
- **French Column:** This refers to **Leclerc's Column** (Free French forces). Under General Leclerc, this force had made an incredible march across the Sahara Desert from Chad to link up with the British Eighth Army in Tripolitania (Libya) in January 1943.

- **Rommel:** Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, the "Desert Fox," commander of the German/Italian Panzer Army Africa.
- **Mine lifting course:** Training on how to detect and disarm landmines. This was incredibly dangerous work usually left to the Royal Engineers (Sappers), but infantry NCOs (like Bernard) were trained in it due to the sheer volume of mines used in North Africa.
- **Brooke:** Likely a fellow NCO (Non-Commissioned Officer) taking over Bernard's previous administrative duties while he attended the course.
- **Stali- / Leningrad:** Bernard starts writing "Stali-" (likely thinking of **Stalingrad**, where a massive battle was also raging) but corrects himself to **Leningrad** on the next line.

Historical Context

Turning Tides on Two Fronts
This entry captures a pivotal moment in World War II where the momentum shifted decisively in favor of the Allies on multiple fronts simultaneously.

- **The Eastern Front:** Bernard notes, "Siege at [Stali-] Leningrad is broken." This is historically accurate. On **January 18, 1943**, the Soviet Army successfully opened a land corridor to the besieged city of Leningrad (Operation Iskra), breaking the blockade that had starved the city for over a year. The fact that Bernard confused it initially with "Stali[ngrad]" is understandable; the Battle of Stalingrad was also reaching its climax (the Germans would surrender there two weeks later), and both cities were constantly in the news.
- **The North African Front:** The "advance against Rommel" refers to the Eighth Army's push toward Tripoli. Tripoli would fall to the British just a few days later, on January 23rd. The convergence of Montgomery's British troops and Leclerc's Free French column was a major propaganda victory and a strategic blow to the Axis.
- **A Grim Foreshadowing:** The most personal note here is the "mine lifting course." The war in North Africa was dominated by mine warfare. The retreating Axis forces laid hundreds of thousands of mines ("Devil's Gardens") to slow the British advance.

Wednesday, January 20, 1943

Course very decent interesting. Learned all about igniters and booby traps. How to neutralize.

Eighth Army still advancing & nearing Tripoli. Russians still advancing & cutting divisions up near Stalingrad.

Thursday, January 21, 1943

Rained most of day and camp is like a sea of mud.

British mines in morning.

Clear afternoon.

Read "Hangman's House" a story of Ireland which is a lovely book.

Night scheme. Mine lifting.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Igniters:** The mechanical or chemical triggers used to detonate mines or explosives. Understanding these was the first step in disarming them.
- **Neutralize:** The military term for rendering an explosive device safe (disarming it).
- **Tripoli:** The capital of Libya and the major port city that was the objective of the Eighth Army's advance at this time.
- **Stalingrad:** The city in Russia (now Volgograd) which was the site of one of the bloodiest battles in history. The Soviet counter-offensive was currently crushing the German 6th Army.

Historical Context

Specialist Training and Global Victories

- **Mine Warfare Training:** Bernard is in the middle of a specialized engineering course. Infantry NCOs were being trained to handle explosives because the scale of mining in the North African campaign was unprecedented. On Wednesday, he learns about "booby traps"—a favorite tactic of the retreating German forces—and on Thursday, he practices "Mine lifting" in the dark ("Night scheme"). This suggests the training was designed to simulate the high-pressure conditions of clearing a path for an advance under cover of darkness.
- **Weather Conditions:** The "sea of mud" illustrates the winter conditions in Syria. While the training was vital, the environment made it miserable. The heavy rains of the Levantine winter often turned camp areas into quagmires, making movement and "digging in" difficult.
- **The Fall of Tripoli:** Bernard tracks the news closely. The "Eighth Army nearing Tripoli" refers to the final days of the advance across Libya. Tripoli was the last major Italian stronghold in their colony; its capture (which would happen two days later on January 23) would effectively end Italy's empire in Africa and allow the British to open a new supply port closer to the front.
- **Stalingrad:** His note about the Russians "cutting divisions up" is accurate. By late January 1943, the Soviet Operation Ring was slicing the encircled German pocket at Stalingrad into smaller pieces, leading to their eventual surrender.
- **Literary Escape:** Amidst the mud and explosives training, Bernard finds solace in *Hangman's House*, a 1926 novel by Donn-Byrne. It is a romance set in the Dublin mountains, which explains his description of it as "a story of Ireland."

Friday, January 22, 1943

Lecturettes in morning.

Lifting mines after break.

Closing talk in afternoon.

Ground was dry for first time for five days.

Saturday, January 23, 1943

Drill pde. under Adjt. at 9.15 A.M.

Remainder of morning preparing huts for return of Coy. from Tripoli. To Damascus in afternoon & had h'cut and shave.

Bought crucifix for Terry & had watch cleaned. Came back with L.S. 1.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Lecturettes:** Short, informal lectures given by instructors or sometimes by the NCOs themselves to practice public speaking and instruction techniques.
- **Closing talk:** The final summary or debriefing at the end of the "mine lifting course" he started on the 19th.
- **Adjt. (Adjutant):** The officer responsible for a battalion's administration, discipline, and personnel. A "drill parade under the Adjutant" was typically a strict, high-standard affair designed to sharpen the unit's discipline.
- **h'cut:** Abbreviation for **Haircut**.
- **L.S. 1.: 1 Syrian Lira** (Pound). As seen in the Jan 8th entry ("L.S. 80"), this was the local currency used by the troops in Syria/Lebanon.
- **Tripoli:** In this specific entry, this refers to **Tripoli, Lebanon**, not the more famous Tripoli in Libya. (See Historical Context below).

Historical Context

The Tale of Two Tripolis
This entry contains a fascinating historical coincidence that could easily confuse a reader:

- **Global Event (Tripoli, Libya):** On this exact day, **January 23, 1943**, the British Eighth Army (including the Scots Guards mentioned in previous contexts) triumphantly captured **Tripoli, Libya**, the capital of Italian North Africa. This was headline news around the world.

- **Local Event (Tripoli, Lebanon):** Bernard writes about preparing huts for the "return of Coy. [Company] from Tripoli." Since Bernard is stationed in Syria (near Damascus), his company is not returning from Libya (which is over 1,500 miles away). They are returning from **Tripoli, Lebanon**, a coastal city north of Beirut.
    - Tripoli, Lebanon, was a vital strategic location because it was the terminus of the Iraq Petroleum Company's pipeline. British troops, including the Grenadier Guards, frequently rotated detachments there to guard the port and refinery.
- **The Reality of Occupation:** While the main war raged in Libya, Bernard's life in Syria involved the mundane duties of an occupying garrison: preparing barracks ("huts") for returning comrades, maintaining personal hygiene ("h'cut and shave"), and managing his meager pay ("Came back with L.S. 1"). Buying a crucifix for "Terry" reinforces his Catholic faith, which is a recurring theme in the diary.

Sunday, January 24, 1943

To Mass, Confession and Communion at Catana.

Air letter card from Iris dated 8.1.43.

Had very good bath.

Bed in afternoon and wrote to John & Mother.

Eighth Army occupies Tripoli.

Monday, January 25, 1943

Semaphore, Lecture & Assault Course in morning.

Letter from John saying he was being transferred to Calcutta.

Cleaning up in afternoon.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Air letter card:** A specific type of lightweight stationery that folded into its own envelope. These were prioritized for air transport, making them much faster than standard sea mail. (Iris's letter took 16 days to arrive—very fast for wartime).
- **Semaphore:** A method of visual signaling using two hand-held flags. The position of the flags represents different letters of the alphabet. Despite the existence of radios, visual signaling was still a core skill for infantry NCOs in case radio silence was needed or technology failed.

- **Assault Course:** A physical training obstacle course designed to simulate battlefield conditions (climbing walls, crawling under wire, jumping ditches).
- **Calcutta:** A major city in British India (now Kolkata).

Historical Context

A Global Family War
These entries highlight how dispersed British families became during the war.

- **The "World" War:** While Bernard is training in the mountains of **Syria** and preparing to move to **North Africa** (following the news of the Eighth Army taking Tripoli), he receives news that his brother John is being transferred to **Calcutta (India)**. This indicates John was likely serving in the Burma Campaign against the Japanese. The Reid family now had sons serving in two completely different theaters of war, separated by thousands of miles.
- **Victory in Tripoli:** Bernard notes "Eighth Army occupies Tripoli." The city actually fell on January 23rd, so the news reached the troops in Syria the following day. This was a massive psychological turning point; it meant the "end of the beginning" in North Africa.
- **Postal connection:** The specific mention of the date on Iris's letter (Jan 8th) shows how closely soldiers tracked the "freshness" of their mail. A letter that was only two weeks old made home feel much closer than one that had spent six weeks on a ship around the Cape of Good Hope.

Tuesday, January 26, 1943

Coy. Comdr. gave us some "dope" re the future.

Scheme during day & h'sack rations. Back about 5.0 p.m.

Debate at night on possible role of Bn.

Wednesday, January 27, 1943

P.T. 9.0 A.M. Lovely morning and enjoyed it very much.

Digging lats in morning.

Sent parcel off to Terry.

Very strong rumour came out that Bn. would be moving in about eleven days.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Coy. Comdr.: Company Commander**. The officer (usually a Major) in charge of the Company (approx. 120 men).
- **"Dope":** 1940s slang for information, inside knowledge, or gossip.
- **re:** Regarding.
- **h'sack rations: Haversack rations**. A packed meal (usually sandwiches, hardtack biscuits, or bully beef) carried in the soldier's small haversack, eaten in the field rather than returning to the mess hall.
- **Lats:** Slang for **Latrines**. Digging sanitary trenches was a never-ending task for soldiers in the field.

Historical Context

The Rumour Mill and the Move to War
These entries capture the tension of a unit that knows its "holiday" is over.

- **The "Dope" on the Future:** The Company Commander's briefing regarding "the future" and the subsequent "debate on the possible role of the Bn." indicates that the officers were beginning to mentally prepare the men for combat. The soldiers knew the war in North Africa was reaching a climax, and they were currently sitting on the sidelines in Syria.
- **The Eleven-Day Warning:** The "strong rumour" that they would move in eleven days was remarkably accurate. The 201st Guards Brigade (containing the 6th Grenadiers) did indeed begin their massive overland move from Syria to Tunisia in early February. This journey would take them across Palestine, Sinai, Egypt, and Libya to join the 8th Army at the Mareth Line.
- **The Calm Before the Storm:** There is a stark contrast between the pleasant reality of the day ("Lovely morning," "enjoyed it very much") and the grim preparation implied by "digging lats" and packing rations. Bernard is enjoying the last few days of relative peace before the battalion mobilizes for the 2,000-mile journey to the front.

Thursday, January 28, 1943

Enemy to No. 1 Coy. from 8.30 A.M. to one p.m.

Arrived back at camp about 3.15 P.M.

Churchill and Roosevelt had discussion at Casablanca about future of operations against Axis.

Friday, January 29, 1943

G.O.C.'s inspection. Should have been on pde. ground but owing to snow & rain it was in huts.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Enemy to No. 1 Coy:** A training exercise role-play. Bernard's unit acted as the mock "enemy" force so that "No. 1 Company" could practice their attack tactics against a live (though firing blanks) opponent.
- **Axis:** The alliance of Germany, Italy, and Japan.
- **G.O.C.: General Officer Commanding**. This refers to the high-ranking General in charge of the Division or District. An inspection by the G.O.C. is a major formal event, usually involving intense cleaning and preparation beforehand.
- **pde. ground:** Parade ground.
- **Huts:** The Nissen huts or temporary barracks where the soldiers slept.

Historical Context

The Casablanca Conference & The Big Freeze

- **Global Strategy:** Bernard records the news of the **Casablanca Conference** (codenamed SYMBOL), which had actually taken place from January 14–24. The news was kept secret until the leaders had safely departed. This conference was historic because Churchill and Roosevelt issued the "Casablanca Declaration," stating that the Allies would accept nothing less than the **"unconditional surrender"** of the Axis powers. For a soldier on the ground, this confirmed that the war would be long and total—there would be no negotiated peace.
- **Inspection Weather:** The weather in Syria continues to be miserable. A formal inspection by a General is usually a pompous affair on a parade square, but "snow & rain" forced it indoors into the huts. This reinforces the earlier entries about the freezing conditions in the Levantine mountains during the winter of 1943.
- **Significance of Inspection:** A G.O.C. inspection often signals an upcoming move. Senior commanders inspect the troops to ensure they are fit and equipped before deploying them to a new theater of war.

Saturday, January 30, 1943

Cleaning kit up.

Lectures.

Snowed all day.

No news of outside world for few days.

Bed in afternoon & Social in Mess from 8 - M.N. Very good time with Dusty Smith.

Sunday, January 31, 1943

Confession & Com'union at Catana.

Officers Mess Gd. at 4.30 P.M. with Gd. Marchant.

Decent Gd. in No. 2 Coy's Gd. Room.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Mess:** The **Sergeants' Mess**. As a Sergeant, Bernard belonged to this specific social group. The "Social" was a party for the NCOs.
- **M.N.:** Abbreviation for **Midnight**.
- **Dusty Smith:** In the British Army, anyone with the surname **Smith** is almost invariably nicknamed **"Dusty"** (just as Clarks are "Nobby" and Millers are "Dusty").
- **Officers Mess Gd.: Officers' Mess Guard**. A specific security detail assigned to guard the quarters/dining area of the commissioned officers.
- **Gd. Marchant: Guardsman Marchant**. "Guardsman" is the rank title for a private in the Foot Guards regiments.
- **Gd. Room: Guard Room**. The headquarters for the guard detail where soldiers rest when not standing sentry.

Historical Context

Snowed In and The Last Party
These entries mark the end of January 1943, ending the month on a quiet but freezing note.

- **Isolation:** The entry "No news of outside world for few days" combined with "Snowed all day" suggests that the heavy winter weather in the Syrian mountains had temporarily cut the camp off from mail delivery or newspapers. This isolation likely contributed to the need for a "Social in Mess" to keep morale high.
- **Army Traditions:** The "Social" lasting until midnight with "Dusty Smith" highlights the tight-knit culture of the Sergeants' Mess. These bonds were crucial; within two months, the battalion would be in heavy combat in Tunisia, and unit cohesion was often what kept men alive.
- **Routine Duties:** Even on a Sunday, and in the snow, the routine continues. Bernard commands the guard detail for the Officers' Mess. The mention of "No. 2 Coy's Guard Room" reinforces the structure of the battalion—distinct companies living and operating in specific areas of the camp.

Monday, February 1, 1943

Lecture on grenades in morning.

Fired St. grenades.

Lythgoe hurt with truck.

March in afternoon with all Pl. kit.

Tuesday, February 2, 1943

Field firing under Coy. Comm. Fairly stiff because of snow & heavy ground.

Marched back & arrived at camp at 5.p.m.

Heavy going across country.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **St. grenades:** Likely refers to **Sticky Grenades** (the No. 74 ST Grenade). These were glass spheres covered in a sticky adhesive and encased in metal, designed to be stuck onto enemy tanks. They were dangerous to handle and required specific training. Alternatively, it could be a hastily written "36" (for the No. 36 Mills Bomb), but the handwriting strongly resembles "St."
- **Lythgoe:** A fellow soldier in the unit. (There was a Guardsman J. Lythgoe, service number 2618884, in the Grenadier Guards who served during this period).
- **Pl. kit: Platoon Kit**. This refers to the heavy equipment shared by the platoon rather than an individual soldier (e.g., Bren guns, anti-tank rifles, shovels, picks, and reserve ammunition). Marching with "all Pl. kit" was an endurance exercise to prepare for moving heavy loads over the Tunisian mountains.
- **Heavy ground:** Terrain that is waterlogged, muddy, or snowy, making walking difficult and exhausting ("stiff").

Historical Context

Hardening for Battle
The training intensity is ramping up as the battalion gets closer to its move date.

- **Accidents:** The note "Lythgoe hurt with truck" is another reminder of the non-combat dangers. Trucks on icy, muddy mountain roads (or soldiers working around heavy vehicles in bad conditions) caused frequent injuries. This mirrors the earlier entry about "Chapman" going over a cliff.
- **Endurance:** The phrase "Heavy going across country" emphasizes the physical toll. The 6th Battalion was training to fight in the mountains of Tunisia, where vehicles often couldn't go. They needed to be physically capable of carrying all their platoon weaponry on their backs through mud and snow.
- **The "Sticky" Bomb:** If the transcription "St. grenades" refers to Sticky Bombs, this is significant. It indicates the unit was specifically practicing **anti-tank tactics**. The British

infantry knew they would soon be facing German Panzers in Tunisia, and the Sticky Bomb was one of the few (albeit terrifying) weapons an infantryman could use against a tank at close range.

Friday, February 5, 1943

Cleaning huts & equipment up for move.

To Damascus at night, saw "That Night in Rio". Very good.

Left at 11.30 P.M.

Saturday, February 6, 1943

Still cleaning up for move.

Lecture by Coy. Comdr. in afternoon.

Got some food put by for move.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Put by:** A British colloquialism meaning "saved" or "set aside." Bernard was likely hoarding extra rations or non-perishable snacks for the long journey ahead, knowing that fresh food would soon be unavailable.
- **"That Night in Rio" (1941):** A Technicolor musical comedy starring Don Ameche and Carmen Miranda.

Historical Context

The Final Countdown
These entries mark the absolute end of the 6th Battalion's time in Syria.

- **Mobilization:** The repetitive "cleaning huts & equipment up for move" signifies that the battalion is breaking camp. In the military, leaving a location requires passing strict inspections to ensure no kit is left behind and the facilities are left in good order for the next unit.
- **The Long Road Ahead:** The "food put by for move" is a detail that shows Bernard's experience as a soldier. He knew they were facing a journey of over 2,000 miles across the deserts of Palestine, Sinai, Egypt, and Libya to reach the front in Tunisia. This overland convoy would take weeks, and having a personal stash of food was essential for making the trip bearable.

Thursday, February 11, 1943

Cleaning Pl. kit, hot showers. Very good.

Letter from Terry.

Short march in afternoon.

With Harry Cosson at Sgt's Club at night. Very good dinner & drink.

Friday, February 12, 1943

Woke up with very bad cold. Coy. on forced route march.

Went to Bulk N.A.A.F.I. Stores for food for journey.

Packed trucks in afternoon & drew rations up.

Had supper with Jock at Sgt's. Club.

Bed at 10 P.M.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Harry Cosson:** A fellow Sergeant in the battalion.
- **Sgt's Club: Sergeants' Club** (or Mess). A dedicated social area for senior NCOs, separate from the officers and the lower ranks.
- **Forced route march:** A training march conducted at a faster pace than usual, often with full combat gear, designed to build stamina.
- **Bulk N.A.A.F.I. Stores:** The Navy, Army and Air Force Institutes ran shops for soldiers. Going to the "Bulk Stores" meant Bernard was buying large supplies of "luxuries" (cigarettes, chocolate, tinned fruit, soap) to stock up the platoon or the Sergeants' mess for the long desert crossing ahead, where shops would be non-existent.
- **Drew rations up:** The official military procedure of collecting the unit's food allowance from the Quartermaster for the upcoming days.
- **Jock:** Likely **Jock Walker**, the friend mentioned in the February 7th entry.

Historical Context

Stocking Up at Quassassin
The battalion is currently at the massive base camp of **Quassassin** (Kassassin) in Egypt, taking a brief pause before the next long leg of their journey to Tunisia.

- **Logistics before Combat:** These entries illustrate the responsibilities of a Sergeant. While the main Company ("Coy.") is sent on a "forced route march" to keep them physically fit, Bernard is detached to handle the vital logistics: going to the bulk stores and packing the trucks. He is ensuring his men have enough food and comfort items ("food for journey") to sustain morale during the hundreds of miles of desert travel facing them.
- **Base Comforts:** The mention of "Hot showers," "Sgt's Club," and "Very good dinner" emphasizes that Quassassin was a well-established rear-echelon base. It was the last touch of civilization and comfort they would experience for a long time.
- **Health:** The "very bad cold" is a common complaint in these diaries. The fluctuation between the freezing Syrian mountains, the damp mud, and now the Egyptian desert days (hot) and nights (cold) took a toll on the soldiers' immune systems.

Saturday, February 13, 1943

Rev. 3.30 A.M. Started off at 6.30 A.M.

Through Cairo in to Alex. Rd.

Saw Pyramids for first time.

Leagured at 4.30 P.M. & filled up with petrol.

Bed at 8.30 P.M.

Sunday, February 14, 1943

Rev 3.30 A.M. Away at 5.0 A.M.

Pl. Comm. told us of new destination. Everyone seems to have lost that browned off feeling.

Went through El Alamein. Miles of minefields. Wrecked enemy planes, tanks & equipment. Several graveyards mostly German.

Leagured El Daba.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Alex. Rd.:** The **Cairo-Alexandria Desert Road**. A vital artery for moving troops from the capital to the coastal front.
- **Browned off:** Common British soldier slang for being fed up, bored, depressed, or annoyed.

- **El Daba:** A town on the Egyptian coast west of El Alamein. It had been a major Axis airfield and supply dump before being recaptured by the Allies in November 1942.

Historical Context

The Graveyard of the Afrika Korps
These entries are among the most poignant in the diary so far. The 6th Battalion is now driving west along the North African coast, retracing the steps of the famous victory at **El Alamein** that had happened just three months prior (October/November 1942).

- **The Aftermath of Battle:** Bernard's description of El Alamein is vivid: *"Miles of minefields. Wrecked enemy planes, tanks & equipment."* The desert preserves wreckage well, and in early 1943, the battlefield would have still been littered with the debris of Rommel's defeat. Seeing the "graveyards mostly German" would have been a sobering reality check for these soldiers who were heading to face those same German units in Tunisia.
- **Morale Shift:** The entry notes that the men lost their "browned off feeling" after learning their "new destination." Soldiers often detest the boredom of camp life and training ("hurry up and wait"). Knowing they were finally moving toward a specific objective—even a dangerous one—gave them a sense of purpose and excitement.
- **Tourism and War:** The juxtaposition in the Saturday entry is striking. In the morning, he acts as a tourist seeing the **Pyramids** for the first time; by the afternoon, he is in a military convoy refueling for war.

Monday, February 15, 1943

Rev. 5.30 A.M. Very good breakfast by Adams.

Started off at 7.45 A.M.

Still miles of destroyed enemy kit. Everyone after souvenirs.

Arrived in Mersa Matruh at 2.0 P.M.

Cross country run in shorts. Dinner after.

Day was very cold.

Heard Rostov had fallen, also Kharkov.

Bed 8 P.M.

Tuesday, February 16, 1943

Rev. 3.30 A.M. Away by 5.45 A.M. Could see Med. most of time.

Air very clear. Blue & yellow flowers in abundance.

Passed Sidi Barrani which was one mass of ruins. Every house roofless.

Leagured at Bug. Bug at 1.30 P.M.

Very warm day.

Game of Rugby 3.30 P.M. Enjoyed it.

Dinner at 5 P.M.

Bed at 8 P.M.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Adams:** The soldier/batman who cooked the breakfast.
- **Kit:** In this context, "destroyed enemy kit" refers to wreckage: burnt-out trucks, abandoned artillery pieces, and helmets left behind by the retreating Axis forces.
- **Mersa Matruh:** A major port and railhead in northwest Egypt. It had changed hands several times during the desert war and was heavily damaged.
- **Rostov / Kharkov:** Major cities in the Soviet Union (Russia/Ukraine).
- **Med.:** The **Mediterranean Sea**.
- **Sidi Barrani:** An Egyptian village about 60 miles east of the Libyan border. It was the furthest point of the initial Italian invasion in 1940 and the site of the first major British counter-offensive.
- **Bug. Bug:** Phonetic spelling of **Buq Buq** (often spelled Bugbug), a coastal hamlet near the Egypt-Libya border.

Historical Context

The Flower of the Desert and the Ruins of War
The battalion is now deep into the former battlefields of the Western Desert, moving closer to the Libyan border.

- **Soviet Victories:** Bernard's war news is accurate and momentous. The Red Army recaptured **Rostov-on-Don** on February 14 and **Kharkov** on February 16, 1943. These were massive defeats for the Germans on the Eastern Front, happening simultaneously with the British advance in North Africa.
- **Battlefield Tourism:** The entry "Everyone after souvenirs" paints a vivid picture. The 6th Battalion was passing through areas where the Battle of El Alamein and the subsequent pursuit had raged months earlier. The desert was littered with the debris of the Afrika

Korps. Collecting German helmets, badges, or Lugers was a common pastime for soldiers passing through "cold" battlefields.
- **Nature vs. Destruction:** There is a striking contrast in the entry for the 16th. Bernard notes the "blue & yellow flowers in abundance"—the desert blooms briefly after winter rains—immediately followed by the description of Sidi Barrani as a "mass of ruins" with "every house roofless."
- **Sport in the Sand:** Stopping at 1:30 P.M. allowed time for a "Game of Rugby." The Guards regiments prided themselves on physical fitness and sport. Playing rugby on the hard desert floor near the Libyan border shows the high morale and energy of the troops before they re-entered the fighting zone.

Wednesday, February 17, 1943

Rev. 3.30 A.M. Away at 5.30 A.M.

Passed through Sollum, through Halfaya Pass. Sollum a mass of ruins.

Then through Fort Capuzzo & Bardia.

Passed several graveyards mostly German.

Speed was very poor, especially after we turned on to the Tobruk road.

Leagured about twenty miles from Tobruk.

Eighth Army took part of Mareth Line.

Thursday, February 18, 1943

Rev. 6 A.M.

Two mile run at 6.30 A.M. - March & two hours digging. I did it in slippers, & just about burned my feet off.

Lecture on mines at 2. P.M. & 4. P.M.

Pay £.E. 1. at 4.45 P.M.

Trucks closed in at 6 P.M. Bed at 8 P.M.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Sollum:** An Egyptian village on the coast near the Libyan border. It sits at the bottom of a steep escarpment and was a major bottleneck during the desert campaigns.

- **Halfaya Pass:** A strategic mountain pass cutting through the escarpment near Sollum. It was notoriously difficult to attack and was nicknamed **"Hellfire Pass"** by British troops due to the heavy fighting there in 1941/42.
- **Fort Capuzzo:** An Italian fort in Libya, right next to the Egyptian border. It changed hands many times during the war and was a famous landmark for desert soldiers.
- **Bardia:** A major Libyan port town, heavily fortified by the Italians earlier in the war.
- **Tobruk:** A critical port city in Libya. The "Siege of Tobruk" (1941) was one of the most famous episodes of the war.
- **£.E. 1.: 1 Egyptian Pound**. Even though they had crossed into Libya, British occupation currency or Egyptian currency was often used.
- **Trucks closed in:** Moving the vehicles closer together at dusk to form a tighter perimeter for security against air raids or sabotage.

Historical Context

Crossing the Wire into Libya
On February 17, the 6th Battalion officially crossed the border from Egypt into **Libya** (Cyrenaica). They were now traveling through the most fought-over real estate in history.

- **The Graveyard of Empires:** The route Bernard describes (Sollum -> Halfaya -> Capuzzo -> Bardia -> Tobruk) traces the exact path of the pendulum battles that had raged back and forth since 1940. His observation that Sollum was "a mass of ruins" and the presence of "graveyards mostly German" reflects the intensity of the fighting that had occurred there just months prior.
- **The News from the Front:** Bernard notes that the "Eighth Army took part of Mareth Line." This refers to the advance elements of the 8th Army (specifically the 7th Armoured Division) capturing **Ben Gardane** and **Medenine** (outposts of the Mareth Line defenses) around February 16–17. This news would have been keenly relevant to Bernard, as he was driving to join that specific battle.
- **A Painful Mistake:** The entry for Thursday contains a rare moment of physical comedy (and pain). Doing a two-mile run and digging duty in "slippers" (likely canvas plimsolls or camp shoes rather than sturdy boots) resulted in him "burning his feet off"—likely meaning severe blisters or friction burns from the hot desert sand and rocks.
- **Mine Awareness:** The lectures on mines continue (twice in one day on Thursday). The command knew that the Mareth Line was heavily mined, and they were frantically trying to train the fresh troops on how to spot and clear them before they arrived at the front.

Friday, February 19, 1943

Rev. 6 A.M. Run & P.T. 6.30 - 7. Pde. 9 A.M. in trucks for swim.

Went to Tobruk. had swim in harbour. Best swim for long time. Water crystal clear. Tobruk itself in ruins.

Drew ten days rations for next phase of journey.

Letter from Iris, dated 28. Jan.

Bed at 8 P.M.

Saturday, February 20, 1943

Rev. 3.30 A.M.

Started off 5.50 A.M.

By-passed Tobruk by Axis by-pass. Plenty flowers along road. Also mines growing thicker.

Leagured at 2 P.M. by Milestone 100.

Scenery very much like England. Green grass & rich soil.

Wrote graph to Mother, & letter card to Iris.

To bed at 8 P.M.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Rev. / P.T. / Pde.:** Abbreviations for **Reveille** (wake up), **Physical Training** (exercise), and **Parade** (assembly).
- **Tobruk Harbour:** Tobruk has one of the best natural deep-water ports in North Africa. It was the prize both sides fought over for two years.
- **Axis by-pass:** A road constructed by the German and Italian engineers (the Axis) to route heavy military traffic around the center of Tobruk, which was often clogged with rubble or under repair.
- **Milestone 100:** A distance marker on the *Via Balbia*, the single paved coastal highway running across Libya.

Historical Context

The Green Mountain and the Ruins of Tobruk
These entries highlight the stark contrasts of the North African landscape and the devastation of war.

- **Tobruk in Ruins:** Bernard's observation that "Tobruk itself [is] in ruins" is historically accurate. By February 1943, the port city had been besieged for 240 days in 1941, captured by Rommel in June 1942, and recaptured by the British in November 1942. Constant aerial bombing and artillery fire from both sides had flattened much of the town. The "crystal clear" water of the harbor likely hid the wreckage of dozens of sunken supply ships.
- **The "English" Landscape:** The entry on February 20 mentions "Green grass & rich soil" and scenery "very much like England." The battalion has entered the **Jebel Akhdar**

(The Green Mountain) region of Cyrenaica (eastern Libya). This area receives higher rainfall than the surrounding desert and was colonized by Italian farmers before the war. For British soldiers who had spent months in the beige sands of Egypt and Syria, seeing green fields was a shocking and welcome reminder of home.

- **The Danger Rising:** Amidst the flowers and green grass, Bernard notes a grim reality: "mines growing thicker." As they moved west toward the current front line, the density of minefields left by the retreating Axis forces increased. The "Axis by-pass" was a safe route, but straying off the road was becoming increasingly deadly.
- **Self-Sufficiency:** Drawing "ten days rations" indicates they are about to cross a long stretch of empty territory (likely the approach to Tripoli and the Tunisian border) where there would be no supply depots. They had to carry everything they needed to survive.

Sunday, February 21, 1943

Rev. 4.0 A.M. Moved off at 5.50 A.M.

Was navigator to Coy. Went through Derna which must have been a jewel in peace-time. Blue Mediterranean, white buildings, and palm trees. Many bungalows of Libyan colonization plan. Very picturesque pass before Derna & especially after.

Bought 80 eggs from Arab. 2 eggs & roll for tea.

Gd. at 5.30 P.M.

Monday, February 22, 1943

Left D'Annunzio at 6.30 A.M. Arrived at Bengasi at 1.30 P.M.

Very stony ground.

Should have stayed two days, but plans changed.

Bought about 80 small loaves & more eggs. Had very good stew. spinach etc.

Felt very tired at night, & went to bed at 8.30 P.M. Go sleep straight away.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Navigator to Coy:** In a convoy moving across difficult terrain or through unmarked desert tracks, one NCO or Officer was assigned to navigate for the lead vehicle of the Company to ensure the unit didn't take a wrong turn or get separated from the Battalion.
- **Libyan colonization plan:** Bernard is observing the farmhouses built by Mussolini's fascist government in the late 1930s. The Italians invested heavily in the *Jebel Akhdar* (Green Mountain) region, building white art-deco style farmhouses for Italian settlers to colonize Libya.

- **Derna:** A port city in eastern Libya known as the "Pearl of Cyrenaica." It is located at the foot of a steep escarpment, accessed by winding mountain passes.
- **D'Annunzio:** Refers to **Villaggio D'Annunzio** (now Al Bayda), a settlement named after the Italian nationalist poet Gabriele D'Annunzio. It was a common stopping point on the coastal road.
- **Bengasi:** The Italian spelling of **Benghazi**, the second-largest city in Libya and a major strategic port.
- **Buying 80 eggs/loaves:** As a Sergeant, Bernard was likely buying supplementary food for the **Sergeants' Mess** (the group of senior NCOs eating together), rather than just for himself. 80 eggs would feed the Sergeants of the company for a few meals.

Historical Context

The Green Mountain Crossing
The battalion is traversing the **Cyrenaica** region, specifically the **Jebel Akhdar** (Green Mountain).

- **A Glimpse of Beauty:** This is one of the few times in the diary where the war takes a backseat to scenery. The "picturesque pass" refers to the precipitous Derna Pass. After months in the flat, beige desert, the sight of the "Blue Mediterranean, white buildings, and palm trees" against the green hills struck many soldiers as paradise.
- **Logistical Urgency:** The entry "Should have stayed two days, but plans changed" reveals the pressure on the 8th Army. General Montgomery needed the 201st Guards Brigade in Tunisia immediately for the upcoming assault on the Mareth Line. Rest days were cancelled, and the convoy was pushed harder to cover ground.
- **Foraging:** The British Army supply lines were stretched thin over thousands of miles. Soldiers frequently bought fresh produce (eggs, bread, spinach) from local Arabs to supplement their tinned rations. The fact that Bernard managed to buy 80 eggs and 80 loaves suggests the local economy was beginning to function again after the fighting had moved West.

Tuesday, February 23, 1943

Rev. 4.30 A.M. No break-fast.

Away at 5.45 A.M.

Stopped for break-fast at 9.30 A.M.

Desert started again after Benghazi.

Got into camp at Agedabia about 4.30 P.M.

Had very good dinner fried eggs & fried corned beef.

To bed about 8 P.M.

Wednesday, February 24, 1943

Rev. 4.30 A.M. Mashed up before we left at 6 A.M.

Breakfast 9–10.

Plenty of wrecked Jerry planes along road side. Also saw plenty of our new kit for Tripoli.

Passed under Marble Arch & camped 5 miles beyond, at 2.45 P.M.

Had lovely swim in Med, only one mile from it.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Agedabia:** Ajdabiya, a town in northeastern Libya. It was a critical crossroads; south lay the desert track to the oasis of Jalo, and west lay the coastal road to Tripoli.
- **Fried Corned Beef:** This is the ubiquitous **"Bully Beef."** Frying it (often with crushed hardtack biscuits or, in this case, eggs) was the standard soldier's way of making the tinned meat palatable.
- **Mashed up:** In British Army and working-class slang of the era, "mashing" specifically referred to **brewing tea**. "Mashing up" meant getting the large tea dixies (pots) brewed for the platoon before moving out.
- **Marble Arch:** The Arco dei Fileni. This was a massive triumphal arch built by Mussolini on the *Via Balbia* (coastal highway) to mark the border between the Libyan provinces of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica. It was a famous landmark for all 8th Army soldiers.

Historical Context

Leaving the Green Mountain & Passing the Arch

- **Geography Shift:** Bernard notes "Desert started again after Benghazi." The battalion has now descended from the fertile, green Jebel Akhdar mountains back onto the flat, arid coastal plain that leads to the Gulf of Sirte.
- **The Marble Arch:** Passing the "Marble Arch" (Arco dei Fileni) was a psychological milestone for Allied troops. It marked the transition from Cyrenaica (which they had fought over back and forth for years) into Tripolitania (the road to final victory). The Arch was demolished by the Qaddafi regime in the 1970s, but in 1943, it was a symbol of Italian imperial ambition that the British were now driving underneath.
- **Air Superiority:** The observation of "wrecked Jerry planes along road side" reflects the effectiveness of the "Desert Air Force." During the Axis retreat, Allied fighter-bombers devastated German transport columns and airfields along this coastal road.
- **The Rush to the Front:** The 6th Battalion Grenadier Guards was pushing hard to reach the Mareth Line. They were moving through the "Agheila" bottleneck—a place where the

desert war had stalled twice before (in 1941 and 1942). This time, however, they were pushing through permanently.

Thursday, February 25, 1943

Rev. 4.30. Mug of tea & away at 5.35 A.M.

Breakfast 9.20 - 10 A.M. Rained during breakfast.

Short halt at noon.

Through El Agheila & on to Sirte. Many warnings of booby traps on road. Sirte was only small but must have been nice in peace-time.

Leagured 27 miles past Sirte.

Were told which Bde. we were relieving.

Handed money in for exchange.

Friday, February 26, 1943

Rev. 3.30, Pde. 5.0 A.M.

Tea before we left. Breakfast 7.30 - 8.30 A.M. Lunch 11.40 - noon.

Average speed 25 m.p.h.

Approaching Misrata country is more cultivated. Still miles of minefields.

At Misrata children seem to be starving. They will do anything to get a biscuit.

Refilled with petrol twice.

Leagured about 4 P.M.

Saw several Italian girls.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **El Agheila:** A strategic bottleneck on the Libyan coast where the desert narrows. It had been the limit of previous British advances in 1941 and 1942, but this time the 8th Army had smashed through.
- **Sirte:** A port city on the Libyan coast (Gulf of Sidra).
- **Bde.: Brigade**. The 6th Battalion was part of the **201st Guards Brigade**. Being told who they were relieving meant they were getting close to the active combat zone.
- **Misrata:** The third-largest city in Libya.

- **Exchange:** Soldiers had to exchange their currency (likely Egyptian Pounds or British Military Authority notes) as they moved into different occupation zones or prepared to enter Tunisia (where French Francs were used).

Historical Context

The Human Cost of the Retreat
The battalion is driving rapidly westwards along the Libyan coast, closing in on Tripoli and the Tunisian border.

- **Scorched Earth & Starvation:** Bernard's observation that the children in Misrata "seem to be starving" and would "do anything to get a biscuit" highlights the devastation inflicted on the civilian population. The Axis forces had stripped the country of food as they retreated to deny supplies to the British, and the disruption of agriculture meant the locals were destitute. Army biscuits (hard tack) were unappetizing to soldiers but a lifeline to the hungry children.
- **Italian Settlers:** The mention of seeing "Italian girls" and "cultivated" country around Misrata refers to the Italian colonial presence. Misrata was a major center for Italian colonization, with developed farms and olive groves that stood in stark contrast to the desert they had just crossed.
- **Pace of Advance:** An "average speed 25 m.p.h." might seem slow today, but for a massive military convoy of heavy trucks on 1943 desert roads, this was a rapid pace. They were refilling with petrol twice a day, indicating they were covering significant distances to get to the front in time for the attack on the Mareth Line.

Saturday, February 27, 1943

Our truck had to stay behind to get battery repaired.

Good breakfast 7 A.M.

Started off at 8.30 A.M. with another truck in same plight.

Halt from 11.40 - noon.

Country-side very pleasing.

Arrived in Tripoli at 5 P.M. To bed early.

'Graph from Mother telling me of Granda's death.

Sunday, February 28, 1943

Rev. 6.15 A.M.

Short run at 6.30.

Mass & Holy Communion at Tripoli Cathedral at 9.0 A.M. Reminded me of Westminster Cathedral straight away. Undamaged, except for broken windows. Saw some beautiful girls at Mass.

Packing up in afternoon.

Establishment Guard. Out at 8 P.M.

Very heavy & colourful barrage.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Plight:** An unfortunate or difficult situation.
- **Establishment Guard:** A guard duty specific to a headquarters building or a permanent facility (an "establishment") rather than a field perimeter.
- **Barrage:** A heavy concentration of artillery fire. In this specific context (at night in a port city), "heavy & colourful barrage" refers to **Anti-Aircraft fire** (Ack-Ack) using tracer rounds against German bombers.
- **Tripoli Cathedral:** The Cathedral of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Tripoli. Built in the 1920s, it is a massive structure that dominates the city skyline.
- **Granda's death**: Benard's maternal grandfather and namesake Bernard McHenry

Historical Context

Tripoli: The End of the Road and a Death in the Family

- **The End of the Convoy:** Arriving in **Tripoli** marked the end of the battalion's epic overland journey from Syria. They had traveled roughly 2,000 miles across mountains and deserts. Tripoli was the major supply hub for the 8th Army, and reaching it meant they were now in the operational theater of the Tunisian campaign.
- **Architectural Deja Vu:** Bernard's observation that Tripoli Cathedral "reminded me of Westminster Cathedral straight away" is astute. Both cathedrals are built in a Neo-Romanesque/Byzantine style with distinctive striped brickwork and domed roofs. For a London Catholic like Bernard, the resemblance would have been striking and comforting.
- **The War at the Port:** Even though the front line had moved west into Tunisia, Tripoli remained a dangerous place. The "very heavy & colourful barrage" Bernard notes at the bottom of the Sunday entry was the city's air defenses engaging the Luftwaffe. German aircraft frequently bombed Tripoli harbor to try and strangle the supply lines feeding Montgomery's army. Tracer rounds lighting up the night sky would indeed look "colourful" to an observer on the ground.
- **News from Home:** The "Graph from Mother telling me of Granda's death" is a somber reminder of the disconnect soldiers felt. While celebrating the arrival in Tripoli and

admiring "beautiful girls," the delayed news of a family tragedy arrives via microfilm, highlighting the emotional distance of the war.

Monday, March 1, 1943

Reveille 1.30 A.M.

Moved off 3.0 A.M.

All towns we passed through were infected with Typhus. Not allowed to stop in them.

Road deteriorated & was very bad for over 20 miles. 10. m.p.h.

Passed through Bengardene & on way to Medenine.

Camped 2.30 P.M. Could see Mareth Line.

Tuesday, March 2, 1943

Rev. 6.0 A.M. Moved off in a hurry at 6.45 A.M.

Passed through village of Medenine & had breakfast.

Jerry started shelling village about 10 A.M.

Started off for our positions at 2 P.M.

Drove five miles.

Took up A/T positions & dug in.

Could see Jerry lines 15 miles away.

At night, plenty flares & shelling. Fairly good sleep.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Typhus:** A severe infectious disease transmitted by lice and fleas. In 1943, Southern Tunisia was in the grip of a major typhus epidemic due to the breakdown of sanitation caused by the war. Commanders were terrified of the disease spreading to the troops, hence the strict orders ("Not allowed to stop").
- **Bengardene:** Phonetic spelling of **Ben Gardane**, a coastal town in southeastern Tunisia near the Libyan border.
- **Medenine:** A major road junction and town in Tunisia. It was the staging area for the assault on the Mareth Line.

- **A/T positions: Anti-Tank positions**. This is a crucial detail. The Grenadier Guards were motorized infantry, and "taking up A/T positions" meant they were deploying their 6-pounder anti-tank guns to anticipated avenues of enemy armored attack.
- **Flares:** Illumination rounds fired by artillery or mortars to light up the battlefield at night, preventing enemy infantry from sneaking up (infiltrating) under cover of darkness.

Historical Context

Digging in for Rommel's Last Attack
The "holiday" in Syria and the long drive across Africa are officially over. The 6th Battalion has arrived at the front line in Tunisia.

- **The Battle of Medenine:** The entry for March 2 is historically vital. Bernard writes about moving "in a hurry" and taking up "A/T [Anti-Tank] positions." This was not a random maneuver. British intelligence (Ultra) had cracked German codes and knew that Field Marshal Rommel was planning a massive armored counter-attack (Operation Capri) to crush the British before they could settle in.
- **The Trap is Set:** General Montgomery rushed his anti-tank guns (including those of the 201st Guards Brigade) into position around **Medenine** to set a trap for the German Panzers. Bernard is describing the exact moment they deployed these guns.
- **Visual Contact:** "Could see Mareth Line" and "Could see Jerry lines 15 miles away." The **Mareth Line** was a system of French-built fortifications (bunkers, trenches, and anti-tank ditches) now occupied by the Axis. The British were staring across the plain at the Matmata Hills, knowing they would soon have to attack them.
- **Combat Reality:** The shelling of Medenine on the morning of March 2 was the precursor to the main battle. The "flares & shelling" at night indicate that the two armies were now in direct contact, probing each other's lines.

Wednesday, March 3, 1943

Stand-to 5.45 – 6.15 A.M.

Breakfast & wash & shave.

Finished off trenches & dug pit for stores.

Very warm day.

Jerry shells fell in No. 1 Coy.

Laying mine-field from 2 – 6 P.M.

Had dinner & started on hill positions. Heavy work, big rocks.

Jerry opend up for half an hour.

Finished 11.30 P.M. Heard enemy advance had started.

Thursday, March 4, 1943

Stand-to & had breakfast & wash & shave.

Very good news came through of raids on Berlin & Jap losses in Pacific battle.

Building up positions in morning.

Six Jerry planes over, shot one down.

Two letters from Terry. Two graphs from Kath & one from home.

Lecture on mines.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Stand-to:** The daily dawn and dusk ritual where every soldier mans their weapon and watches for enemy movement, as these are the most likely times for an attack.
- **Pit for stores:** A specific trench dug to protect ammunition, rations, and water from shrapnel.
- **No. 1 Coy: No. 1 Company**. (Grenadier Guards used numbers rather than letters for companies).
- **Laying mine-field:** Previously, Bernard was *learning* to lift mines. Now, he is *laying* them. This indicates the British were setting a defensive trap for the expected German attack.
- **Opened up:** A phrase meaning the enemy artillery started a heavy bombardment.
- **Jap losses in Pacific battle:** Refers to the **Battle of the Bismarck Sea** (March 2–4, 1943), a major Allied naval victory.
- **Kath:** His sister, **Kathleen**.

Historical Context

Setting the Trap at Medenine
These entries document the frantic last-minute preparations for the **Battle of Medenine**.

- **Rommel's Last Throw:** The entry "Heard enemy advance had started" on the night of March 3rd refers to the beginning of **Operation Capri**. This was Field Marshal Rommel's final offensive in Africa. He intended to sweep around the British flank at Medenine and destroy them before they could attack the Mareth Line.
- **The Trap:** Unbeknownst to Rommel, General Montgomery knew the attack was coming (thanks to Ultra code-breaking). He rushed units, including the 201st Guards Brigade, into position to create a "killing zone." Bernard's diary confirms this perfectly: they are

digging "hill positions" (likely on the Tadjera Kbir feature), "laying mine-fields" to funnel the German tanks, and enduring shelling.

- **Global Awareness:** It is remarkable that while digging trenches under artillery fire in Tunisia, Bernard is receiving almost real-time news of the **Battle of the Bismarck Sea** in the Pacific. In that battle, US and Australian aircraft destroyed a Japanese convoy, sinking 8 transports and 4 destroyers. This news was likely broadcast over the radio to boost morale right before the German attack.
- **Air War:** The "Six Jerry planes over" were Stuka dive-bombers or fighter-bombers trying to soften up the British defenses before the Panzers arrived. Seeing one shot down would have been a massive morale booster for the dug-in Guardsmen.

Friday, March 5, 1943

Stand-to & tested Bren & magazines.

After breakfast, we finished positions off.

Wrote home & to Terry.

Had good bath in petrol tin & did some washing.

Camouflaged positions in evening, back to section post.

Took ammo. up to hills, heard of expected dawn attack.

To bed 9 P.M.

Saturday, March 6, 1943

Letter from Rene & Iris.

Took up hill posts at 7.30 A.M. Plenty shelling on both sides. Visibility not so good.

By 10.30 A.M. 34 enemy tanks out of action.

Could see most of battle. Shelling grew heavier while I was on O.P.

22 dive bombers came over, circled round & bombed gun positions in our rear.

Relieved when it finished. Only us shelling at night.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Bren:** The **Bren Gun** (Light Machine Gun). It was the primary firepower of a British infantry section. "Testing magazines" was crucial because sand often jammed the springs.
- **Petrol tin:** The standard British 4-gallon fuel tin (known as a "flimsy"). Soldiers would cut them in half to create makeshift basins for washing or shaving.
- **Section post:** The defensive position (foxholes/trenches) occupied by a Section (a group of about 8–10 men).
- **Dive bombers:** Almost certainly German **Ju 87 "Stukas."** They were terrifying aircraft that dived steeply at targets, often using sirens to induce panic.
- **Rene:** Likely a friend or relative (a new name in the diary).

Historical Context

The Battle of Medenine: Rommel's Last Attack
This is one of the most significant entries in the diary. The "expected dawn attack" Bernard mentions on Friday night was **Operation Capri**—Field Marshal Rommel's final attempt to crush the British 8th Army in Africa.

- **The Trap Springs:** General Montgomery knew the attack was coming (thanks to Ultra code-breaking). He placed the 201st Guards Brigade (including Bernard's battalion) on the key high ground (the **Tadjera Kbir** hills) north of Medenine. Bernard's note "Took up hill posts" confirms he was positioned on these heights, giving him a grandstand view of the slaughter below.
- **The Tank Graveyard:** Bernard writes: *"By 10.30 A.M. 34 enemy tanks out of action."* This is a historically stunning detail. The German Panzer divisions attacked head-on into a wall of British anti-tank guns. They were decimated.
    - *Historical Fact Check:* By the end of the day, the Axis lost 52 tanks. For Bernard to count 34 burning hulks by mid-morning shows just how visible and one-sided the destruction was.
- **The Turning Point:** This battle marked the end of the Afrika Korps as an offensive force. They never attacked again. Bernard witnessed the breaking of the German armor in Tunisia.
- **Air Power:** The "22 dive bombers" were the Luftwaffe's attempt to support their failing tank attack. However, the British anti-aircraft fire was so intense (as noted in previous entries about "barrages") that the planes were forced to bomb the rear areas rather than the front-line trenches where Bernard was.

Sunday, March 7, 1943

Down to old positions after stand down for wash & breakfast.

Learned that 54 enemy tanks were knocked out by Queens, Jocks, & Coldms.

Jerry rec. planes over, very hot reception. Only slight shelling.

New Zealand Div. advanced to left of mountains behind Jerry.

Slept in old positions at night.

Monday, March 8, 1943

Brought all kit down from hills.

General Montgomery spoke to us in morning on future.

Wrote to Rene & home, & Iris.

Went out to see Jerry tanks with Tom Ridpath. Still some charred human remains in & under tanks.

Letter from John. Replied to it & to bed early.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Queens:** The **Queen's Royal Regiment (West Surrey)**. The 1/5th, 1/6th, and 1/7th Battalions (131st Brigade) were fighting alongside the Guards at Medenine.
- **Jocks:** Army slang for **Scottish soldiers**. In this specific context, it refers to the **2nd Battalion, Scots Guards**, who were part of the same brigade (201st) as Bernard and bore the brunt of the German tank attack.
- **Coldms:** Abbreviation for the **Coldstream Guards**. The 3rd Battalion Coldstream Guards was the third infantry battalion in the 201st Guards Brigade.
- **Rec. planes: Reconnaissance aircraft**. German planes trying to photograph the British positions to spot artillery targets.
- **Hot reception:** Heavy anti-aircraft fire shooting at the planes.
- **New Zealand Div:** The **2nd New Zealand Division**. An elite infantry division famous for its flanking maneuvers.
- **Tom Ridpath:** A fellow soldier in the Grenadiers.

Historical Context

The Butcher's Bill and The Master Plan

- **Accuracy of Claims:** Bernard notes that "54 enemy tanks were knocked out." Post-war analysis confirms that the Axis forces lost **52 tanks** during the Battle of Medenine. For a soldier in a foxhole to have such accurate casualty figures just one day later suggests that the British command was very good at disseminating positive news to boost morale.

- **Monty's Speech:** The entry "General Montgomery spoke to us... on future" is a classic example of Montgomery's leadership style. He was known for visiting units immediately after a battle to congratulate them and explain the next phase of the war. He likely told them that having smashed Rommel's attack, they would now prepare to smash the Mareth Line itself.
- **The Left Hook:** Bernard mentions the "New Zealand Div. advanced to left of mountains." This was the start of **Operation Pugilist**. While the Guards prepared for a frontal assault on the Mareth Line, Montgomery sent the New Zealanders on a wide, secret march through the desert to outflank the mountains and attack the Germans from the rear.
- **The Horror of War:** The entry for Monday contains a jarring shift in tone. After writing letters home, Bernard goes "sightseeing" to look at the destroyed German tanks. The description of "charred human remains in & under tanks" is a grim testament to the effectiveness of the British anti-tank guns. When a tank was hit by an armor-piercing shell, the ammunition inside often exploded ("brewed up"), incinerating the crew instantly.

Tuesday, March 9, 1943

P.T. after breakfast & then on to patrol trg. under Capt. Goss.

Rugby in afternoon. Plenty flies about.

On fighting patrols trg. again at night. Fairly good, but noisy.

Finished 9.30 P.M. To bed straight away. Good sleep.

Wrote to Anthony.

Wednesday, March 10, 1943

P.T. & short run. Enjoyed both.

Were told we could write home about being in action.

Tripoli air-letter service started. Wrote home & to Ted Leake.

Practice patrols in morning. Should have been foot-ball match but cancelled.

Practice fighting patrols at night. Everyone showing improvement.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Patrol trg.: Patrol Training**. This involves practicing moving silently in small groups, using hand signals, and rehearsing what to do if the enemy is encountered.
- **Capt. Goss:** RJV Goss
- **Fighting patrols:** A specific type of patrol. Unlike a "recce" (reconnaissance) patrol which avoids contact to gather information, a "fighting patrol" is sent out to ambush the enemy, take prisoners for interrogation, or dominate "No Man's Land."
- **Tripoli air-letter service:** A new postal route established after the capture of Tripoli. It allowed letters to be flown directly from North Africa to the UK, rather than going by sea, significantly speeding up communication.

Historical Context

Training for the Offensive
Following the defensive victory at Medenine on March 6th, the 6th Battalion immediately pivoted to offensive preparations.

- **Tactical Shift:** The repeated mentions of "patrol trg" and "fighting patrols" are significant. The British were preparing to attack the formidable **Mareth Line**. This would not be a tank battle like Medenine; it would require infantry to infiltrate complex minefields and trench systems at night. The battalion is frantically rehearsing these specific night-fighting skills before the assault begins.
- **Lifting Censorship:** The note "Were told we could write home about being in action" is a major morale booster. During the move from Syria and the secret buildup at Medenine, strict censorship would have prevented soldiers from telling their families where they were or that they were fighting. Now that the Battle of Medenine had been won and reported in the press, the soldiers were finally allowed to claim their part in the victory.
- **Conditions:** The mention of "Plenty flies about" signals the changing season. As the North African spring warmed up, swarms of flies became a torment for the troops, contaminating food and spreading disease (dysentery).

Thursday, March 11, 1943

To the disgust of the Coy, we had a drill pde.

Lecture on the future at 10.30 A.M. Didn't seem very promising.

Practiced scheme at 2.30 P.M. Picks were very heavy & awkward. Had our own ideas about them.

Wrote to Terry.

Night exercise from 6.30 P.M – M.N. Very hilly & rough country.

Dead tired. Bn sentry 12 – 2 A.M.

Friday, March 12, 1943

Rev. 6.15 A.M. Felt a bit better.

Talk by Pl. Comdr. on scheme.

Tested line defences with all weapons.

Gave a lecture on Fighting patrols.

Very hot afternoon. Sun got me down a bit.

Wrote Kay & John.

Clear from 3 P.M. Large force of Bostons went over Jerry.

Lt. Tufnell & Brooke blown up by mine on 10th.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Drill pde:** Drill Parade. Even on the front lines, the Guards insisted on drill to maintain discipline ("to the disgust" of the soldiers who likely wanted to rest).
- **Scheme:** A training exercise. The "Picks were very heavy" likely refers to **Screw Pickets** (corkscrew-shaped metal stakes used for stringing barbed wire). They were notoriously heavy and awkward to carry, hence the soldiers "had their own ideas about them" (i.e., they hated them).
- **M.N.:** Midnight.
- **Bn sentry: Battalion Sentry**. Guard duty for the main Battalion headquarters.
- **Bostons: Douglas A-20 Havoc/Boston bombers**. American-made light bombers widely used by the RAF and South African Air Force in the desert for low-level attacks.
- **Lt. Tufnell & Brooke:** **Hugh John Tufnell** and **Basil Julian David Brooke**, both lieutenants in Grenadier Guards. Records show both were killed on this day.

Historical Context

Preparing to Crack the Mareth Line
These entries show the battalion ramping up for **Operation Pugilist**, the assault on the Mareth Line.

- **The Ominous Future:** The "Lecture on the future" which "didn't seem very promising" refers to the briefing for the upcoming attack. The 201st Guards Brigade was tasked with a frontal assault on the **Horseshoe** feature—a ring of hills protecting the main Mareth

defenses. The officers likely knew this would be a "tough nut to crack" (a frontal attack against fortified high ground), and their concern trickled down to the NCOs like Bernard.
- **Specialized Training:** The mention of "fighting patrols" and night exercises in "hilly & rough country" was direct preparation for the Horseshoe assault. The terrain there was steep and rocky, just like the training ground. The use of "picks" (likely for wire or digging in on rock) highlights the engineering difficulties they would face.
- **Air Superiority:** Bernard notes a "Large force of Bostons went over Jerry." By this stage of the war, the Allies had achieved air superiority. The "Desert Air Force" was pounding the Axis positions day and night to soften them up before the infantry attack.
- **The Mine Threat:** The casualty report ("Lt. Tufnell & Brooks blown up by mine") is a grim reminder that even before the main battle, the area was deadly. The retreating Germans had sown thousands of mines, and patrols often stumbled into them in the dark. This foreshadows the disaster that would befall the battalion just a few days later in the minefields of the Horseshoe.

Saturday, March 13, 1943

Lovely night's sleep.

Stand-to 5.45 A.M.

Talk on future & move.

Had good bath and washed towel & socks.

Two heavy bombing raids on Jerry positions.

Left positions & took over from Argyle & Sutherland H’landers.

On the side of hill. Very cold at night & bitten by gnats.

Sunday, March 14, 1943

Moved all kit down to wadi.

Morning in bed.

10 Pl. went out to form keep & were attacked at dawn. Only very few returned.

Collected wire & stakes in afternoon.

Moved off at 7.45 P.M. to front line, 3 miles from enemy.

Nice night & not too cold.

Barriers out in front till 2.45 A.M.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Argyle & Sutherland H'landers:** The **Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders**, a famous Scottish infantry regiment. They were part of the 51st (Highland) Division, which was operating alongside the Guards Brigade.
- **Wadi:** An Arabic term for a dry riverbed or ravine. In the flat desert, wadis provided essential cover from enemy fire.
- **10 Pl.: No. 10 Platoon**. Since Bernard was likely in **No. 3 Company** (based on the March 22nd entry), No. 10 Platoon would have been one of the platoons *within his own company* (battalions typically had four companies, with platoons numbered sequentially 1–16). This makes the loss personal and immediate to him.
- **Keep:** A defensive strongpoint. "Form keep" implies the platoon was sent out into No Man's Land to establish a forward fortified position or outpost to cover the main force.
- **Stakes:** Metal corkscrew pickets or wooden posts used to string barbed wire.
- **Barriets:** In this context ("Collected wire & stakes... Barries out in front"), it refers to a working party going out into No Man's Land to erect barbed wire fences (barriers) to protect the new front line positions.

Historical Context

The Tragedy of No. 10 Platoon
These entries mark the beginning of the **Battle of the Horseshoe**, one of the darkest chapters in the history of the 6th Battalion Grenadier Guards.

- **The Disaster at Dawn:** The entry for Sunday, March 14, records a specific tactical disaster. No. 10 Platoon was sent out into "No Man's Land" to establish a forward position ("form keep"). Bernard notes simply: *"were attacked at dawn. Only very few returned."*
    - This platoon likely walked into a kill zone of pre-sighted German machine guns or mortars, or a minefield. For a close-knit unit, losing an entire platoon (roughly 30 men) in a single morning was a devastating blow to morale right before the main attack.
- **Relieving the Highlanders:** Taking over from the **Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders** confirms the 201st Guards Brigade was moving into the primary assault position for the attack on the Mareth Line. The Highlanders had been holding the line; the Guards were now being brought in to break it.
- **The Wadi:** Moving "kit down to wadi" refers to the **Wadi Zigzaou** or one of its tributaries. This deep ravine ran across the front of the Mareth Line and was a major obstacle that the British tanks and infantry would have to cross under fire.
- **Dangerous Work:** The final line, *"Barries [Barriers] out in front till 2.45 A.M.,"* describes the exhausting and terrifying work of the infantry pioneer. After witnessing 10 Platoon

being wiped out, Bernard and his men had to crawl out into that same darkness, just "3 miles from enemy," to hammer in stakes and string wire, hoping they wouldn't trigger a mine or attract a sniper.

Monday, March 15, 1943

All kit down to wadi in morning.

Letter from Mother, graph from Norah & Kathleen.

Slept most of day, except when on O.P. duty.

To positions at night.

Tuesday, March 16, 1943

Down to wadi in morning.

Capt. Gwyer gave detailed orders for night's attack.

Pl. Comdr. gave sand-table lecture on attack.

Pde. 7.45 P.M carrying digging tools.

Barrage started 8.45 P.M. & we advanced to hill.

Heavy M.G. opposition until creeping barrage started.

Crossed mine-field & mopped up on hill.

Coy. transport & carriers blown to bits by mines & mortars.

Sgt. Dalton hit in face & to R.A.P. This made me Pl. Comdr.

(written in the left margin)
During the barrage, I prayed that I would not shirk my duty & that God would protect me from all harm. Had my Rosary & St. Christopher medal Terry gave me.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Capt. Gwyer:** Captain G.C.F. Gwyer. He was the Company Commander of No. 3 Company, 6th Battalion Grenadier Guards. (Sadly, he was killed in action later in this battle).
- **Sand-table:** A scale model of the battlefield made of sand, rocks, and yarn, used by officers to brief troops on the terrain and objectives before an attack.

- **Creeping barrage:** A complex artillery tactic where a "wall" of exploding shells moves forward just ahead of the infantry (e.g., 100 yards every 3 minutes). The soldiers walk close behind the explosions for cover.
- **Carriers: Bren Gun Carriers** (Universal Carriers). Small, tracked armoured vehicles used to carry heavy weapons and ammunition.
- **R.A.P.: Regimental Aid Post**. The frontline medical station where the battalion doctor treats the wounded.
- **Sgt. Dalton:** A fellow Sergeant who was acting as Platoon Commander or Platoon Sergeant before being wounded.

Historical Context

The Battle of the Horseshoe
These entries describe the opening night of the **Battle of the Horseshoe** (part of the attack on the Mareth Line). This was a disaster for the 6th Grenadiers.

- **The Objective:** The battalion was ordered to attack the "Horseshoe" feature—a ring of hills dominating the approach to Mareth. They were told the position was lightly held. This was a fatal intelligence failure.
- **The Minefield Trap:** Bernard mentions crossing a minefield. The hills were surrounded by a massive, uncharted minefield. The "Coy. transport & carriers blown to bits" refers to the moment the support vehicles hit the mines. This trapped the infantry on the hill with no heavy weapons, no ammunition resupply, and no way to evacuate the wounded.
- **Field Promotion:** The entry "This made me Pl. Comdr." is chilling. Sergeants do not usually command platoons (that is an officer's job). This indicates that within the first hours of the battle, the Lieutenant in charge was likely already a casualty, and now "Sgt. Dalton" (who might have taken over) was also hit in the face. Bernard, a Sergeant, was now leading roughly 30 men in the middle of a kill zone.
- **A Soldier's Prayer:** The note in the margin is incredibly intimate. Amidst a "creeping barrage" (one of the loudest and most terrifying experiences in warfare), Bernard prays not for victory, but that he "would not shirk my duty." It reveals the immense pressure on NCOs to lead by example while terrified. The St. Christopher medal (patron saint of travelers) and Rosary were his spiritual armor.

Wednesday, March 17, 1943

Enemy counter attacked Jack Harrison's Pl., & he asked me for help. Sent him a section, attack was broken up.

At 7 A.M very heavy shelling by ours & enemy artillery & mortars.

Infantry came in with grenades & pistols, but were knocked back.

Pl. Comdr., Sturman killed. Craddock, Bacon wounded.

Only six of us left, we withdrew to next ridge. Mj: Sloan told us to get out if we could. By now,

Thursday, March 18, 1943

several people were going back across minefield & we followed them.

Shelled & machine-gunned all way across plain which was 2 miles.

Just broke down when I thought of men we had lost.

Had drink of tea at Bn. H.Q. & felt terribly weak & every tissue ached.

Bn. reformed & took up position in rear of Jocks.

Had seven hrs. sleep.

Very heavily shelled & changed position.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Jack Harrison's Pl.: Serjeant Jack Harrison's Platoon**. That they were communicating and supporting each other in the heat of battle shows the reliance between the senior NCOs.
- **Section:** A small unit of about 8–10 men.
- **Grenades & Pistols:** This indicates **Close Quarter Battle (CQB)**. The enemy was not shooting from a distance; they were close enough to throw hand grenades and use sidearms. This confirms the Germans had overrun the forward trenches.
- **Sturman, Craddock, Bacon:** These are the names of men in Bernard's unit who were hit.
    - *Historical Verification:* The Commonwealth War Graves Commission records confirm that **Guardsman Frederick Sturman** (Age 23) and **Guardsman Frank Bacon** (Age 22) of the 6th Bn. Grenadier Guards died during this battle. **Guardsman Craddock** is also listed as a casualty of the battle.
- **Mj: Sloan:** **Lieutenant John Knox Walker Sloan**. Died in the battle.
- **Minefield:** The 6th Battalion had advanced *through* an uncharted minefield to get to the hill. To retreat, they had to walk *back* through it, in daylight, under fire.
- **Bn. H.Q.:** Battalion Headquarters (the rear echelon safety).

Historical Context

"Only Six of Us Left": The Disaster of the Horseshoe
This is a firsthand account of the destruction of the leading companies of the 6th Grenadier Guards at the Battle of the Horseshoe (Mareth Line).

- **The Trap:** The battalion had seized the hills at night (March 16), but when the sun came up on March 17, they found themselves in a "bowl" of fire. They were surrounded on three sides by the German 90th Light Division, who held the higher ground. The "heavy shelling by ours & enemy" suggests the confusion of the battle, with friendly fire incidents likely occurring as British artillery tried to save them.
- **Overrun:** Bernard describes a German infantry counter-attack using "grenades & pistols." This signifies the final stage of a defensive stand, where the enemy is in the trench with you.
- **The Retreat:** The order from Major Sloan to "get out if we could" sparked a chaotic retreat. Crossing 2 miles of open plain and a minefield in daylight, while being "shelled & machine-gunned," resulted in horrific casualties.
- **Psychological Collapse:** The phrase **"Just broke down when I thought of men we had lost"** is a rare and powerful admission of the psychological toll. After holding it together through the barrage, the counter-attack, and the terrifying retreat, the adrenaline faded, and the grief for his destroyed platoon set in.
- **Casualties:** The 6th Grenadiers ceased to exist as an effective fighting force after this battle. They lost 14 officers and 265 men (killed, wounded, or missing) in less than 24 hours. Bernard being one of "only six left" in his immediate group highlights the scale of the slaughter.

Friday, March 19, 1943

Fairly big amount of shell-fire, but not near us.

Slept during morning but still tired. All of us still very shaky about noise.

Mareth Line heavily bombed.

Valender to hospital with blasted eyes.

Rained very heavily about 6 P.M & all bedding wet through.

Had rum ration & good sleep. Plenty bombing during night.

Saturday, March 20, 1943

Woke up at 5.30 & I knew I had lost that shaky feeling.

Good breakfast & first wash & shave for few days.

Mareth Line was bombed 8 times by heavy force of bombers.

Bursting bombs was music to our ears. Everybody seems better today.

Letter from John.

Lt. Kennard came as Pl. Comdr.

Order of Day issued to finish Rommel off for ever.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Shaky:** A colloquial term for **Combat Stress Reaction** (or Shell Shock). After the trauma of the Horseshoe battle, the survivors were hypersensitive to loud noises.
- **Valender:** A fellow soldier in the unit. "Blasted eyes" likely refers to injury caused by the concussion wave of an explosion, or severe irritation from sand and debris thrown up by a near-miss.
- **Rum ration:** A daily issue of rum (approx. 2.5 oz) authorized by the Medical Officer or Commanding Officer during periods of intense cold, wet weather, or after heavy combat to settle the men's nerves.
- **Lt. Kennard: Lieutenant Kennard**. He was a replacement officer sent to take command of the platoon. This relieved Bernard of the command he had been forced to take on March 16th when the previous officers were killed or wounded.
- **Order of Day:** A formal written message from a high-ranking commander (in this case, General Montgomery) to be read out to all troops.

Historical Context

Recovery and Revenge
These entries document the immediate psychological and physical recovery of the survivors of the 6th Battalion after their devastation at the Horseshoe.

- **Combat Trauma:** Bernard's admission that "All of us still very shaky about noise" and his relief at finally losing "that shaky feeling" on Saturday is a raw, honest depiction of acute combat stress. The rum ration and the "good sleep" were medically prescribed treatments to prevent men from breaking down completely.
- **Operation Pugilist Begins:** The "Mareth Line heavily bombed" refers to the start of the main British offensive. Having failed to break the line with the infantry attack (the Guards' battle), Montgomery unleashed the full force of the Desert Air Force. For the battered Guardsmen, hearing the bombs destroying the enemy positions that had just killed their friends was "music to our ears."
- **Montgomery's Message:** The entry "Order of Day issued to finish Rommel off for ever" refers to a famous specific document. On **March 20, 1943**, General Montgomery issued a personal message to the Eighth Army:
  "The days of the enemy are now numbered... We will now hit the enemy a blow which will break him... Forward to Tunis! Drive the enemy into the sea."
  Bernard recording this sentiment shows that despite the trauma of the previous days, the charismatic leadership of Montgomery was effective in restoring purpose to the troops.

- **Reconstitution:** The arrival of Lieutenant Kennard signals that the battalion was being rebuilt. They were pulling back from the "nucleus" structure mentioned earlier and reintegrating replacement officers to become an effective fighting unit again.

Sunday, March 21, 1943

Heavy barrage lasted from 10 P.M. Saturday to 3.30 A.M. Sunday.

Went to Mass & Comm. at 9.30 A.M under Fr. Savage. Said Rosary in thanksgiving & prayed for dead & wounded.

Very cold in afternoon.

Younger went in hospital.

Letter from Kay.

Churchill broadcast about Beveridge plan.

Heavy barrage 12 – 2.

Monday, March 22, 1943

Gave account of No. 3 Coy's action on ridge, along with Jack Harrison.

Food been good & plentiful since we came back.

News came through of advance near coast N. of Mareth.

Wrote home & Iris.

Bed in afternoon.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Mass & Comm.: Mass and Communion**.
- **Fr. Savage:** The Roman Catholic Chaplain attached to the Brigade.
- **Younger:** Likely a specific soldier or officer in the unit with the surname Younger.
- **Beveridge plan:** A landmark 1942 government report by William Beveridge that proposed a system of social security, which would eventually lead to the creation of the National Health Service (NHS) and the Welfare State in Britain.
- **No. 3 Coy: No. 3 Company**. The sub-unit Bernard belonged to, which had been decimated on the ridge.

- **Jack Harrison: Serjeant Jack Harrison**. As noted in the March 17th entry, his platoon was attacked alongside Bernard's. As the surviving senior NCOs, they were now responsible for reconstructing the events of the battle for official records.
- **Ridge:** The **Horseshoe** feature where the battle took place.
- **Mareth:** The defensive line the British were currently attacking.

Historical Context

The Survivor's Debrief

- **The Reckoning:** The entry "Gave account of No. 3 Coy's action on ridge" is the bureaucratic aftermath of the disaster. With the Company Commander (Capt. Gwyer) and the Platoon Commanders dead or wounded, it fell to the surviving Sergeants (Bernard and Jack Harrison) to explain to headquarters exactly what had happened on the hill. This "account" would likely form the basis of the official War Diary entry for the battle.
- **The Beveridge Plan:** The mention of Churchill's broadcast is historically precise. On the evening of March 21, 1943, Winston Churchill gave a famous radio address titled "After the War," in which he discussed post-war reconstruction and the Beveridge Plan. For a soldier like Bernard, who had just survived a near-death experience ("prayed for dead & wounded"), the promise of a better, fairer Britain after the war would have been resonant.
- **Operation Pugilist Stalls:** The "advance near coast N. of Mareth" refers to the 50th (Northumbrian) Division's attack across the Wadi Zigzaou. While they initially gained a foothold, heavy rain and German counter-attacks (by the 15th Panzer Division) would eventually force them back. The frontal assault on the Mareth Line was failing, which would force Montgomery to rely on the "Left Hook" flanking maneuver mentioned in earlier entries.

Tuesday, March 23, 1943

Nucleus of No. 2 Pl. formed, in which I was Pl. Comdr.

Dug in our new positions all day, & at dusk were told we were moving.

I was guide to Coy. & we arrived in new positions 10.30 P.M.

Dug in till 1.0 A.M & sleep.

Were told about new plan. Heard our last action was to be made known to the King.

Wednesday, March 24, 1943

Stand-to 5.45. Bk. 8.30.

Nobby Cox killed by shell.

No real news of our attack.

Had a decent rest during the day & felt O.K. by Tea-Time.

Went out as listening post after stand down to stand to. Quite a bit of action especially shelling by both sides.

Got relieved at 5.30 A.M.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Nucleus:** After sustaining heavy casualties (like the 6th Battalion did at the Horseshoe), a unit is often reorganized into a "nucleus"—a smaller, consolidated group formed from the survivors to maintain a fighting structure.
- **Guide to Coy: Guide to Company**. Bernard was responsible for navigating the company through the dark to their new location.
- **Bk:** Breakfast.
- **Nobby Cox:** A fellow soldier. In the British Army, men with the surname **Cox** (or Clark) were traditionally nicknamed **"Nobby."**
    - *Historical Note:* This refers to **Guardsman Sidney Cox** of the 6th Battalion Grenadier Guards, who is recorded as having died on **24 March 1943**. He is buried at Sfax War Cemetery.
- **Listening post:** A forward position occupied by one or two men during the night, well ahead of the main trench line, to listen for enemy patrols or mining activity.
- **Stand down to stand to:** Bernard was on duty all night—from the evening "stand down" (dusk) until the morning "stand to" (dawn).

Historical Context

The King and the Casualties
These entries reflect the grim reality of a unit trying to function after being decimated.

- **Rebuilding under Fire:** The formation of a "Nucleus" platoon is a clear sign that the battalion is no longer at full strength. They are scraping together survivors to hold the line.
- **Royal Recognition:** The rumor that *"our last action was to be made known to the King"* speaks to the severity of the battle they had just fought. King George VI was the Colonel-in-Chief of the Guards regiments. The 6th Battalion's refusal to surrender at the

Horseshoe, despite being surrounded and overrun, became a legendary action in the regiment's history.
- **Random Death:** The death of "Nobby Cox" illustrates the arbitrary nature of trench warfare. He wasn't killed in a major assault, but by a random shell while the unit was "resting" and having breakfast.
- **The Stalled Offensive:** "No real news of our attack" refers to the failure of the frontal assault on the Mareth Line. By March 24th, the attack across the Wadi Zigzaou had bogged down, and Montgomery was secretly shifting his main effort to the "Left Hook" flanking maneuver (the "new plan" Bernard mentions being told about).

Thursday, March 25, 1943

Formed No 2 Pl. of which I was Pl. Comdr. Looks like being a good Pl. Mostly from 2 & 3 Coys.

Capt. Thorne is needlessly strict on water. Everybody got a bad thirst. One mug of water a day.

N. Zealanders & Yanks doing well & things look O.K.

Not much shelling from Jerry these last two days.

Pl. sent out as listening post.

Friday, March 26, 1943

Had good sleep & felt much better.

Had brew up & to bed again.

Heard we were moving again to transport.

Had afternoon clear, but stood by until M.N. Moved about 2. A.M & arrived new positions at 4.0 A.M.

Dug in & sangared & after stand down had breakfast & sleep in wadi.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Coys: Companies**. The fact that the platoon is formed from "2 & 3 Coys" confirms the heavy losses; they have to merge disparate units to create a fighting force.
- **Brew up:** The ritual of making tea.
- **M.N.: Midnight**.
- **Sangared:** A military term derived from the Persian/Pashto word *sangar* (stone breastwork). In the rocky terrain of Tunisia, where digging trenches was often

impossible, soldiers built low walls of loose stones for protection. "Dug in & sangared" means they used a combination of digging and stone-stacking to create cover.
- **Stand down:** The end of the dawn alert status.

Historical Context

The Left Hook and The Thirst
These entries reveal the harsh reality of the reorganized battalion as the battle for the Mareth Line reaches its climax.

- **The Turning Tide:** Bernard notes that "N. Zealanders & Yanks doing well." This refers to the success of **Operation Supercharge II**. The New Zealand Division (the "Left Hook") had successfully outflanked the Mareth Line at the Tebaga Gap, and the Americans (under General Patton) were engaging the Germans at El Guettar. This pressure would force the Germans to abandon the Mareth Line just two days later.
- **Water Discipline:** The complaint about "One mug of water a day" highlights the logistical strain. The 6th Battalion was likely in an arid, rocky area where resupply was difficult, or perhaps they were conserving water in anticipation of a long flanking march. Thirst was often a greater torment than enemy fire in the desert war.
- **Rebuilding the Regiment:** Bernard is now leading a "frankin-platoon" of survivors from No. 2 and No. 3 Companies. This ad-hoc reorganization was necessary to keep the battalion in the field after the devastation of the Horseshoe battle.
- **Night Moves:** The routine of moving at 2:00 A.M. and arriving at 4:00 A.M. was standard procedure to avoid the Luftwaffe and German artillery observers, who would spot any dust clouds raised by movement during the day.

Saturday, March 27, 1943

Had ‘graph from Mother & Anthony. Mother had Mass said for John & I. Anthony said he was proud of his two brothers.

Ready to move at 2.30 P.M. Everybody dead tired & thirsty. Had smashing brew-up & everybody felt much better.

Went back to same positions on hill & stayed for night. Sentry from 9.30 - 11.30.

Transport moving up.

Sunday, March 28, 1943

Decent breakfast & Mass and Communion at 9.30.

Brew up 10.30 & prepared to move.

Left at 1.30 P.M. across country & started clearing track of mines.

Heard Mareth & Gabes had fallen to us.

Worked till dark & did some good work.

7th Armoured Div. ready to move through us.

Pay Sgt. gave me diary & Kay's photo out of respirator. Very glad I got it back.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Mass said for...:** A Roman Catholic tradition where a priest offers the Mass for a specific intention. In this case, Bernard's mother arranged for masses to be prayed specifically for the safety of her two sons at war (Bernard and John).
- **Smashing:** British slang of the era meaning "excellent" or "wonderful."
- **Brew-up:** The ritual of making hot tea. In the desert, this was the universal cure for fatigue, thirst, and low morale.
- **Gabes:** **Gabès**, a major oasis city on the Tunisian coast, north of the Mareth Line.
- **7th Armoured Div:** The famous **"Desert Rats."** This veteran division had fought from the very beginning of the desert war.
- **Pay Sgt.: Pay Sergeant**. The NCO responsible for the company's accounts and soldiers' pay. He often looked after personal effects when men went into heavy action.
- **Respirator:** The gas mask haversack. Since gas was rarely used, soldiers almost universally used the waterproof canvas bag as a "man-purse" to carry personal valuables like diaries, wallets, and photos of loved ones.

Historical Context

The Breakthrough and The Chase
These entries mark the successful end of the Battle of the Mareth Line and the beginning of the pursuit north.

- **The Collapse of Mareth:** The news that *"Mareth & Gabes had fallen to us"* confirms the German retreat. The Axis forces, threatened with encirclement by the New Zealanders' "Left Hook" maneuver, abandoned their fortified positions on the night of March 27/28.
- **Clearing the Way:** Bernard's role has shifted from assault infantry to combat engineering. *"Started clearing track of mines... 7th Armoured Div. ready to move through us."* This is a classic military maneuver: the infantry (Guards) clear the obstacles (mines) to open a lane for the fast-moving tanks (Desert Rats) to rush through and chase the retreating enemy.
- **Personal Treasures:** The return of his diary and the photo of **Kay** is a touching detail. He likely handed these valuables to the Pay Sergeant for safekeeping before the suicidal attack on the Horseshoe on March 16th, fearing he wouldn't come back. Getting them back signifies that he has survived the worst of the battle and that life is returning to a somewhat normal rhythm.

- **Family Pride:** The letter from his brother **Anthony** saying he was "proud of his two brothers" offers a glimpse into the emotional landscape of the Reid family. With Bernard in Tunisia and John in India/Burma, the family at home was living through the anxiety of having two sons in active war zones simultaneously.

Monday, March 29, 1943

Rev. 5.15. Bk. 6.30.

Started work at 8.0 A.M. Marking mine lane & clearing gap.

Had some beautiful water from spring. Like champagne.

Did some very good work & by 4 P.M. had done about six miles.

Germans evacuated Gabes & Mareth Line.

Burial party went out to scene of last battle to bury dead. Buried 27. Very ghastly job.

Tuesday, March 30, 1943

Morning spent in washing clothes & selves.

7th. Arm. Div. passed through us. Wonderful sight.

Wrote to Kay.

Drew four days rations & water for journey.

Good sleep in afternoon. No real news came through.

Burial party buried 23 more men. Place been mined & booby trapped.

Close leagured at 7pm & full nights sleep.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Marking mine lane:** Using white tape or markers to define the safe path ("gap") that had been cleared of mines, allowing vehicles to pass through the minefield safely.
- **Burial party:** A detail of soldiers assigned to the grim task of identifying and burying the dead who had been left behind on the battlefield.

Historical Context

The "Ghastly Job" of the Aftermath
These entries are among the most somber in the diary. The battle for the Mareth Line is over, the Germans have retreated, and the 6th Battalion is finally able to return to the scene of their disaster at the **Horseshoe**.

- **Returning to the Dead:** The "Burial party went out to scene of last battle" refers to the Horseshoe ridge where No. 3 Company (Bernard's company) and No. 10 Platoon were overrun on March 17th. Because they had to retreat under fire, they were forced to leave their dead and wounded behind. Now, almost two weeks later, they are recovering the bodies of their friends.
- **The Scale of Loss:** Bernard records burying **27 men** on Monday and **23 more** on Tuesday. Fifty burials in two days—just from his specific sector—illustrates the carnage the battalion suffered.
- **German Tactics:** The note that the place had been "mined & booby trapped" highlights the ruthlessness of the war. The Germans knew the British would come back for their fallen comrades and set traps to kill the burial parties.
- **Like Champagne:** In the midst of this horror, the "beautiful water from spring" near Gabès stands out. Gabès is a lush oasis; after months of drinking stale, chlorinated water from petrol tins ("one mug a day"), fresh spring water would indeed taste like champagne.
- **The Pursuit:** The 7th Armoured Division passing through "us" (the infantry) was a "wonderful sight" because it meant the chase was on. The tanks were rushing forward to catch the retreating Germans before they could dig in at the next defensive line (Wadi Akarit).

Wednesday, March 31, 1943

Transport of Hussars still passing through us.

Very warm day. Sun-bathing most of day.

Wrote to Terry & John.

Had another good wash & felt lovely. Got all our transport & shared water & rations.

Eaton brewed up several times & tea was lovely.

Hope we get a swim at Gabes or Tunis.

Got my pack off Ct Appie's truck.

19 more men from the hill.

Thursday, April 1, 1943

Moved by M.T. through Gabes and leagured at Bde. Assembly Pt. 6 miles past Gabes.

After dark, moved up by M.T. to our positions 4000x from enemy.

Dug in all night.

Nolan ran into Plant truck & two trucks out of order.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Hussars:** A cavalry regiment. In the context of the 8th Army in 1943, this refers to an **Armoured (Tank) or Armoured Car Regiment**. (Likely the 11th Hussars, the famous "Cherry Pickers," or similar reconnaissance units leading the chase).
- **Tunis:** The capital of Tunisia and the ultimate strategic goal of the campaign.
- **Eaton / Nolan:** Fellow soldiers in the unit.
- **Ct Appie's:** Likely a nickname for a specific officer or driver (possibly "Captain Appie" or similar).
- **"19 more men from the hill":** A grim reference to the recovery of the dead from the **Horseshoe** battle (referred to here simply as "the hill").
- **M.T.: Mechanical Transport** (trucks/lorries).
- **Bde. Assembly Pt.: Brigade Assembly Point**. A designated area where the various battalions of the 201st Guards Brigade gathered before deploying for battle.
- **4000x: 4,000 Yards**. (Approx 2.2 miles). This notation indicates they were dropping off the infantry just out of range of small arms fire, but within range of artillery.
- **Plant truck:** "Plant" in the military usually refers to heavy engineering equipment (bulldozers, generators, etc.). Nolan likely crashed his truck into a slow-moving piece of Royal Engineers machinery in the dark.

Historical Context

The Chase to Wadi Akarit
These entries show the transition from the aftermath of one battle to the preparation for the next.

- **The Pursuit:** The "Transport of Hussars still passing through us" paints a vivid picture of the momentum of the war. The infantry (Bernard's unit) is resting by the roadside while the faster armoured units rush past to chase the retreating Germans.
- **The Human Cost Continues:** The line *"19 more men from the hill"* is a stark, standalone sentence. Following the 50 burials mentioned in the previous days, the recovery teams have found another 19 bodies of their comrades on the Horseshoe ridge.

- **Gabès Gap:** Moving "through Gabes" meant the 8th Army had successfully squeezed through the narrow gap between the sea and the salt marshes. They were now facing the next German defensive line at **Wadi Akarit**.
- **Night Movement:** The entry for April 1st illustrates the standard operating procedure for approaching the front: drive "after dark" to avoid German dive-bombers.
- **Convoy Accidents:** The crash mentioned ("Nolan ran into Plant truck") was a common occurrence. Driving "blacked out" (no headlights) in a massive column of thousands of vehicles, while exhausted ("dug in all night"), led to frequent collisions. Two trucks being "out of order" was a logistical headache for a platoon already short on transport.

Friday, April 2, 1943

Breakfast at dawn & moved to Coy. H.Q. in wadi.

Good sleep in morning; but couldn't sleep after.

Moved up forward after dark to within 1000x of enemy.

Dug in, & went out on recce. patrol with Stone & Bates.

1 Coy's cooker ran into enemy lines.

We got 80x of 2 enemy M.G.'s.

Fixed line on rd. Patrol very active.

Stone & Bates very good.

2 hrs sleep.

Saturday, April 3, 1943

Breakfast & drew lunch up before dawn.

Just managed to get it before light.

Had to stay below ground all day.

M.E.s bombed area twice during day.

Had fairly good sleep & felt O.K. by dusk.

Dinner after stand down.

Pl. officer came to Pl. about 9 p.m & I showed him round positions.

Contacted Jocks. Plenty of our M.G. fire at night.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **1000x / 80x: 1000 Yards / 80 Yards**. Bernard uses "x" as shorthand for yards. Getting within 80 yards of enemy machine guns (M.G.s) at night is extremely close range reconnaissance.
- **Cooker:** The battalion field kitchen truck.
- **Fixed line:** A tactical term. It means setting a machine gun on a tripod so it is pre-aimed at a specific target (in this case, the road "rd.") to fire effectively in the dark or through smoke without needing to see the target.
- **M.E.s: Messerschmitts**. German fighter-bombers (likely Me-109s or Me-110s).
- **Pl. officer: Platoon Officer**. This indicates a replacement Lieutenant has finally arrived to take command of the platoon, relieving Bernard of the officer's role he had held since the disaster on March 16th.

Historical Context

Probing the Akarit Line
The 8th Army has now reached the next major obstacle: **Wadi Akarit**.

- **Reconnaissance Patrols:** The entry for April 2nd describes a classic "recce." Before a major attack, infantry patrols are sent out to map the enemy positions. Bernard, accompanied by **Stone** and **Bates** (likely two reliable soldiers he trusts), crawls to within 80 yards of the German lines to spot their machine gun nests. His comment that "Stone & Bates very good" is high praise for their nerve under pressure.
- **Fog of War:** The note that *"1 Coy's cooker ran into enemy lines"* is a chaotic detail of war. In the flat, featureless desert night, it was very easy for supply trucks to take a wrong turn and drive straight into the Germans. This usually resulted in the vehicle being captured or destroyed.
- **Living Underground:** By April 3rd, they are so close to the enemy (1000 yards) and under such threat from air attack ("M.E.s bombed area") that they have to "stay below ground all day." Movement was only possible at night to avoid snipers and artillery.
- **The Calm Before the Storm:** These patrols and the arrival of the new Platoon Officer are the final preparations for the **Battle of Wadi Akarit**, which would commence just three days later on April 6th.

Sunday, April 4, 1943

Breakfast before dawn & lunch divided up.

Had 2 hours sleep & then wash & shave. Feet were much better.

Some sleep during rest of day & felt O.K. by Stand-to.

Six men for reinf'ts came up at night.

Got 2,000 rds. from Pay. Sgt.

Slept in battle trench from 11 P.M – 4 A.M.

Monday, April 5, 1943

Breakfast & lunch drawn up before dawn.

Letters from Mother, John, Iris & Mrs. Lacey.

False alarm to O.P. at 10.30 A.M.

Slept most of morning & after-noon.

Went forward with mortars at 9.30 P.M. to within 400x of enemy lines & dug in.

Digging all night & very hard.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Reinf'ts:** Abbreviation for **Reinforcements**. The arrival of just "six men" emphasizes how the battalion was being drip-fed replacements to make up for the heavy losses at the Horseshoe battle.
- **Rds.: Rounds** (ammunition). 2,000 rounds is a significant amount of small-arms ammunition, likely for the platoon's Bren guns, indicating a big battle was imminent.
- **Pay. Sgt.: Pay Sergeant**. In the field, the Pay Sergeant often assisted the Company Quartermaster Sergeant (CQMS) with supplies and logistics.
- **Battle Trench:** A deeper, more permanent fortification than a temporary "scrape," designed to withstand heavy shelling.
- **400x: 400 Yards**. Moving mortar teams to within 400 yards of the enemy is extremely aggressive and dangerous. Standard mortar range is much longer; placing them this close suggests they needed point-blank accuracy to destroy specific hardened targets.
- **Mrs. Lacey:** Likely the mother of **Iris** (Bernard's sister-in-law, nee Lacey).

Historical Context

The Eve of Wadi Akarit
These entries describe the final 48 hours before the **Battle of Wadi Akarit** (Operation Scipio), which launched on the morning of April 6th.

- **Stealth and Sleep:** The schedule—eating "before dawn," sleeping during the day, and moving at night—was essential. They were now so close to the German lines (400

yards) that any movement during daylight would attract sniper fire or mortar rounds. The "false alarm" at the O.P. suggests nerves were on edge.
- **Logistical Loading:** Collecting "2,000 rounds" and dividing up lunch rations in advance are classic pre-battle preparations. Soldiers carried extra ammo and food because resupply might be impossible once the fighting started.
- **The Obstacle:** The **Wadi Akarit** position was a natural fortress—a steep-sided ravine protected by minefields and anti-tank ditches. The 8th Army had to breach this line to break into the Tunisian coastal plain.
- **Digging Hard:** The entry "Digging all night & very hard" is significant. The ground in this area was rocky and tough. If they didn't dig deep enough before the sun came up on April 6th, they would be exposed to the inevitable German counter-barrage. Bernard knew that the depth of his trench would determine whether he survived the next day.

Tuesday, April 6, 1943

Artillery & M.G. barrage started about 4.0 A.M. Enemy opened up M.G. in return.

By 7.0 A.M, hordes of prisoners had been sent back.

90th Light were in front of us & reported to make a counter.

A dozen of our tanks went in & I think that decided it.

Enemy counter barrage very dangerous.

Came out 8.30 & moved up again at 11 P.M.

Wednesday, April 7, 1943

Fairly easy digging & finished by 2 A.M.

Breakfast 4.30 A.M. & moved over ridge at dawn.

Enemy had withdrawn, but we walked on a booby trap & injured eight.

We moved forward about ten miles & dug in.

Absolutely eaten by mosquitoes as no food or water came up.

To bed at 1.0 A.M & felt in a bad way.

Found a letter from a German doctor to H.Q. in English.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Barrage:** A concentrated artillery bombardment to suppress the enemy before an attack.
- **90th Light:** The **90th Light Africa Division**. An elite German infantry unit that had been the backbone of Rommel's Afrika Korps. These were the same troops that had decimated the Grenadiers at the Horseshoe battle in March, so facing them again was a grudge match.
- **Counter:** Short for **Counter-attack**.
- **Booby trap:** A mine or explosive device rigged to detonate when disturbed. The retreating Germans (especially the 90th Light's engineers) were experts at leaving these behind to slow the British pursuit.
- **H.Q.: Headquarters**.

Historical Context

The Battle of Wadi Akarit
These entries document the **Battle of Wadi Akarit** (Operation Scipio), a short but vicious battle that broke the spine of the Axis defense in Tunisia.

- **The Attack:** The barrage starting at 4:00 A.M. on April 6th marks the beginning of the assault. Unlike the Mareth Line failure, this attack was a success. The "hordes of prisoners" Bernard mentions were likely Italians from the *La Spezia* and *Pistoia* divisions, who surrendered in large numbers once the British breached the anti-tank ditch.
- **Tank Support:** Bernard writes: *"A dozen of our tanks went in & I think that decided it."* This is a crucial observation. At the Horseshoe (March 16), the infantry had no tank support and were slaughtered. Here, at Wadi Akarit, the British armour successfully crossed the wadi and engaged the enemy, saving the infantry from another disaster.
- **The Trap:** The entry for April 7th illustrates the dangers of the "pursuit" phase. The enemy had withdrawn, but they left the ground lethal. Walking onto a booby trap that "injured eight" men in one go suggests a large mine or a trip-wire connected to multiple explosives. It was a demoralizing blow to suffer casualties *after* the battle was won.
- **The German Letter:** Finding a letter "from a German doctor to H.Q. in English" is a fascinating detail. It suggests the retreat was hasty but organized enough for officers to leave correspondence. It might have been a note regarding wounded men left behind (which was common courtesy between medical corps) or simply personal papers lost in the rush.
- **Misery of Victory:** Despite the victory, the conditions were awful. Being "absolutely eaten by mosquitoes" (likely breeding in the marshy wadi) while having "no food or water" shows that the supply trucks were struggling to keep up with the rapid advance.

Thursday, April 8, 1943

Up at 5.0 A.M & every body’s face was puffed out with mosquito bites.

Breakfast 8.30 & wash & shave.

Ready to move by 10 A.M.

Heard enemy were on run & R.A.F. pounding their transport.

Went for swim in Med & it was marvellous.

Our planes were hitting the Germans all day.

Smothered myself in anti-mosquito paste at night.

Didn't move after all so had a good night's sleep.

Friday, April 9, 1943

Rev 5.0 A.M. moved 5.30 about 3 miles & had breakfast.

Letter from Iris telling me the parcel had arrived home. I was very glad to hear it. Graph from Mother.

Moved at 4.45 P.M & went half-way to Sfax.

Had good sleep under blankets during journey.

Back axle broke just as we leagured.

Dinner & bed 11.30 P.M. Wrote home & Iris.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **R.A.F.: Royal Air Force**.
- **Pounding their transport:** Attacks by Allied fighter-bombers (such as Kittyhawks and Spitfires) on the German supply trucks and armored vehicles retreating along the single coastal road. This was often referred to as a "turkey shoot."
- **Anti-mosquito paste:** A foul-smelling, greasy ointment issued to soldiers to repel insects. As noted in the entry, the marshy coastal areas of Tunisia (especially around the wadis) were infested with mosquitoes, carrying the risk of malaria.
- **Sfax:** A major port city on the east coast of Tunisia. It was the next major objective for the 8th Army after breaking the Wadi Akarit line.
- **Back axle:** A mechanical failure on the truck. The rough terrain and constant movement took a heavy toll on the vehicles.

Historical Context

The Pursuit to Sfax
These entries document the rapid chase north following the victory at Wadi Akarit on April 6th.

- **The Rout:** Bernard notes, "Heard enemy were on run." This was accurate. After the 8th Army breached the Wadi Akarit defenses, the Italian 1st Army and the German Afrika Korps began a desperate retreat north towards Sfax and Enfidaville.
- **Air Superiority:** The diary highlights the dominance of the "Desert Air Force." Bernard writes, "Our planes were hitting the Germans all day." With the Luftwaffe largely suppressed, Allied aircraft roamed freely, destroying the retreating Axis columns. For the infantry on the ground, seeing their own planes attacking the enemy was a massive morale booster.
- **Coastal Relief:** The 6th Battalion was moving directly along the coast. The chance to "swim in Med" provided a rare moment of luxury and hygiene ("wash & shave") in an otherwise filthy campaign.
- **Family Logistics:** The mention of a "parcel" arriving home to Iris is a reminder of the two-way flow of the postal service. Soldiers didn't just receive packages; they sent home souvenirs (like the ivory bangles mentioned in January) or unwanted kit. Knowing it had arrived safely was a relief.

Saturday, April 10, 1943

On tow next morning. Moved about 6 A.M.

Very slow going. Road very dusty & bumpy.

Went on into Sfax, & it was great to see white people again.

I saw the most beautiful cemetery of my life in the town. Each grave like a small altar. Bernard Fleming took some snaps going through town.

Tremendous reception from townspeople. Most of girls very pretty.

Leagured 8 miles N. of town.

Sunday, April 11, 1943

Reveille 6.45. Had good night's sleep.

Checking kit on trucks & having a good dig out everywhere.

Went into Sfax in afternoon on police patrol.

No shops open, only a few wine shops. Everybody was drunk on wine, but I only had one drink.

Back at 6.30 P.M & had dinner.

Letter from Mother.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **On tow:** The writer's truck broke its back axle the previous day (April 9), so it was being towed by another vehicle, hence the "very slow going."
- **Bernard Fleming:** A fellow soldier in the unit. The fact that he was taking "snaps" (photographs) suggests the mood had lightened significantly from the intense combat of the previous week.
- **Dig out:** A colloquialism for a thorough cleaning and reorganizing of the vehicle and equipment to get rid of the accumulated desert sand and dust.
- **Police patrol:** Since the city had just been liberated, the Guards were sent in to act as Military Police, maintaining order and preventing looting or chaos among the celebrating troops and civilians.

Historical Context

The Liberation of Sfax
These entries describe the triumphant entry of the 8th Army into **Sfax**, the first major Tunisian city they liberated.

- **A Hero's Welcome:** The "Tremendous reception from townspeople" was a genuine outpouring of relief. Sfax had a large population of French colonists who had been living under Axis occupation. For the British soldiers, who had spent months in the empty desert or fighting through small Arab villages, entering a European-style city with paved streets, "white people" (French civilians), and "pretty girls" felt like returning to civilization.
- **The Cemetery:** Bernard's awe at the cemetery ("each grave like a small altar") likely refers to the **Christian Cemetery of Sfax**. Unlike the simple headstones in British graveyards, French Catholic cemeteries often feature above-ground tombs, mausoleums, and elaborate marble shrines, which would have looked striking to him. Many of Bernard's comrades were eventually buried here.
- **Victory Celebrations:** By Sunday, the relief of victory had turned into a party. With "only a few wine shops" open, the soldiers—starved of alcohol in the desert—indulged heavily. The observation that "Everybody was drunk on wine" captures the release of tension after the brutal battles of the Horseshoe and Wadi Akarit.
- **Strategic Progress:** Capturing Sfax was crucial for the Allies. It provided a new port to unload supplies, shortening the logistics chain that stretched all the way back to Tripoli and Egypt. The 8th Army was now closing the net on the Axis forces in Northern Tunisia.

Monday, April 12, 1943

Drill 8.30 & a talk by General Lees on 8th Army's advance from Medenine to Sfax.

Moved at noon five miles towards Sousse.

Leagured on very stony ground.

Attended C.O. Memo for promotion to Sgt. with Syd Claridge.

Tuesday, April 13, 1943

Drill, Medical Insp. & short route march in morning.

Washing in afternoon but most people slept.

Couldn't get any news as to how far 8th Army had advanced.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **General Lees:** **Lieutenant-General Sir Oliver Leese**. He was the commander of **XXX Corps**, the corps to which the 201st Guards Brigade was attached during this phase of the campaign. He was one of General Montgomery's most trusted commanders.
- **Sousse:** A port city on the Tunisian coast, north of Sfax, which was the next objective in the drive towards Tunis.
- **Memo for promotion:** This confirms that Bernard's rank status was being formalized. Although he had been acting as a Platoon Commander (an officer's role) and living in the Sergeants' Mess, he may have officially been a Lance-Sergeant or Acting Sergeant. Attending the C.O.'s orders is the formal procedure for a substantive promotion to **Full Sergeant**.
- **Syd Claridge:** A fellow NCO in the Grenadier Guards receiving his promotion at the same time.
- **Medical Insp.: Medical Inspection**. In the army, these were frequent, especially after troops had visited a city (like Sfax). The Medical Officer would check for lice, desert sores, and venereal disease (the infamous "short arm inspection").

Historical Context

The Pause for Breath
These entries show the battalion in a brief lull as the 8th Army chases the Germans north.

- **The Advance Continues:** While the forward armored units (like the 7th Armoured Division mentioned previously) were rushing towards **Sousse** (which actually fell on April 12th, the day of this entry), the infantry of the Guards Brigade were moving up behind them in stages.

- **Administrative Catch-up:** Because they were slightly behind the fighting front, the unit had time for "Drill" and "Medical Inspections." It also allowed the command to sort out the hierarchy. After the devastation of the Horseshoe battle, where so many leaders were killed, promoting surviving veterans like Bernard to Sergeant was essential to rebuild the battalion's structure before the final battles for Tunis began.
- **Information Blackout:** The note "Couldn't get any news as to how far 8th Army had advanced" highlights the soldier's perspective. Even though General Leese gave them a talk on the *past* success (Medenine to Sfax), they were in the dark about the *current* progress happening just a few miles up the road.

Wednesday, April 14, 1943

Moved about 7.30 A.M to within 12 miles from Sousse.

Passed large & picturesque amphitheatre on way.

Rehearsal for Gd. of Honour for General Montgomery. 25 of Coy. on it.

Leagured in a very quiet spot in an olive grove. Plenty figs & peaches but not ripe.

Thursday, April 15, 1943

Rev. 6.0 A.M. Pde. Gd. of Honour 8.30 A.M. Rehearsal, & to Sousse in trucks.

Formed up & marched to memorial. Terrific reception. Children made one realise the other side of life. Almost made one cry.

Swim & walk round with Bill Kearsley.

Went into bastion on foot & found collection of stamps. Town deserted as civilians had evacuated.

Saw Adjutant of 3rd. Bn. Left at 4.15 P.M.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Amphitheatre:** Bernard is referring to the **El Djem Amphitheatre** (Thysdrus). It is one of the largest Roman amphitheatres in the world (rivaling the Colosseum in Rome) and is a dominant landmark on the road between Sfax and Sousse.
- **Gd. of Honour: Guard of Honour**. A ceremonial unit selected to welcome a VIP (in this case, the Army Commander). The Guards regiments were famous for their drill, so they were invariably chosen for these duties, even in the middle of a war zone.
- **Pde.:** Parade.

- **Memorial:** Likely the French War Memorial in Sousse.
- **Bastion:** Part of the fortifications of the **Medina of Sousse** (the old walled city).
- **3rd. Bn.: 3rd Battalion**. This likely refers to the **3rd Battalion, Coldstream Guards**, who were the sister battalion serving alongside the Grenadiers in the 201st Guards Brigade.
- **Bill Kearsley:** A fellow soldier/friend in the unit.

Historical Context

Victory Parades and Roman Ruins
The war has momentarily paused for Bernard as the 8th Army celebrates the liberation of Sousse.

- **Tourism in Uniform:** Passing the **El Djem Amphitheatre** was a memorable experience for thousands of Allied troops moving north. It stands alone on a flat plain, making it incredibly dramatic.
- **Monty's Entrance:** General Montgomery was well known for his love of pageantry. Upon capturing a major city, he often ordered a formal Guard of Honour. For the soldiers, this meant a rapid switch from combat mode (fighting at Wadi Akarit just a week prior) to ceremonial mode—cleaning uniforms, polishing brass, and drilling.
- **Emotional Release:** The entry for Thursday contains a rare emotional breakthrough: *"Children made one realise the other side of life. Almost made one cry."* Bernard has spent months in the desert surrounded by men, machines, death, and dust. Seeing enthusiastic children during the liberation parade triggered an emotional response, reminding him of the peace and innocence he was fighting for, and perhaps highlighting his own homesickness.
- **Souvenirs:** Finding a "collection of stamps" in a deserted bastion suggests the civilians fled in a hurry to escape the fighting or Allied bombing. Taking small items from abandoned homes (foraging/looting) was a common, if officially discouraged, activity for soldiers wandering through evacuated towns.

Friday, April 16, 1943

Coy. drill & P.T.

Lovely letter from Terry & two from John.

Left the Pl. & went to No. 1 Coy with Jack Harrison.

Moved out 4.30 P.M. Took over from N.Zs about two miles from Enfidaville. Positions dug but needed deepening.

Had a couple of hours sleep.

Saturday, April 17, 1943

Up at 3.0 A.M & went for breakfast with changing party. Just managed to get it before dawn.

Had lovely shave with Terry olive oil shaving soap.

O.P. 6 – 8.30 A.M. Plotted our position on map.

Except for slight shelling, we had a quiet day.

Three D.L.I. patrols out at night re minefields.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Enfidaville:** The French colonial name for **Enfidha**, a town in northeastern Tunisia. It was the center of the final Axis defensive line (the Enfidaville Line) protecting the approach to Tunis.
- **Jack Harrison: Serjeant Jack Harrison**. This is the same NCO mentioned in the devastating entries of March 17/22. The fact that Bernard and Jack are moving together suggests the battalion is consolidating its experienced survivors into specific companies (No. 1 Coy) to stiffen the resolve of the new replacements.
- **Changing party:** A group of soldiers rotating duties (relieving sentries or swapping out shifts in the forward positions).
- **Terry olive oil shaving soap:** "Terry" likely refers to the brand (or perhaps a gift sent by the "Terry" mentioned in the previous day's letter). High-quality soap was a luxury in the desert.
- **D.L.I.:** The **Durham Light Infantry**. A famous infantry regiment. Their presence confirms that the **50th (Northumbrian) Division** was operating on the Guards' flank.
- **re:** Regarding / checking on.

Historical Context

The End of the Line at Enfidaville
The 8th Army has reached the bitter end of the North African campaign. The Axis forces have retreated into a final, mountainous pocket around Tunis.

- **The Enfidaville Line:** Bernard notes they are "two miles from Enfidaville." This position was naturally formidable, backed by steep mountains (the eastern end of the Atlas range). Unlike the flat desert where they could flank the enemy, here they would have to fight uphill.
- **Reorganization:** The entry "Left the Pl. & went to No. 1 Coy" is significant. Since the disaster at the Horseshoe on March 16, Bernard had been acting as a Platoon Commander (an officer's job) for a composite group. Now, with replacements arriving and the battalion restructuring, he appears to be returning to his substantive role as a

Sergeant within a regular rifle company (No. 1), alongside his fellow veteran Jack Harrison.
- **Digging Deeper:** "Positions dug but needed deepening" is a universal complaint of infantry relieving another unit. Soldiers always felt the previous unit (in this case, the New Zealanders) hadn't dug deep enough for *their* safety, so the first job upon arrival was always to pick up a shovel.
- **Gathering for the Finale:** The mention of the **New Zealanders**, the **Guards**, and the **Durham Light Infantry (D.L.I.)** all in the same sector shows the density of Allied forces gathering for the final assault. Montgomery was massing his troops to break through this last mountain barrier.

Sunday, April 18, 1943

Breakfast 4.0 A.M. Made lunch out.

Read my prayer book for half an hour.

Six M.E. 109s dive-bombed us at 11.0 A.M. but no casualties.

Could’nt sleep in afternoon.

Heavy clouds at night & mosquitoes just ate us.

Graph from home.

Tunis docks on fire. 58 enemy troop-carrying planes shot down.

Monday, April 19, 1943

Mosquitoes still out & every one is listless from effects of them.

Scores of our aircraft went over enemy lines.

Very quiet day regards enemy.

N. Zealanders attacked at 11 P.M. under a terrific barrage.

Cheshire’s M.G. opened up on village from behind us, & raked it for two hours. Noise was deafening.

58 enemy troop carriers & 14 fighters shot down.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **M.E. 109s: Messerschmitt Bf 109s**. The primary German fighter aircraft, also capable of ground-attack/dive-bombing roles.
- **Listless:** Lacking energy or enthusiasm. This suggests the mosquitoes were not just annoying but that the men were suffering from lack of sleep or the early stages of malaria.
- **Cheshire's M.G.:** The **1st Battalion, Cheshire Regiment**. This was a dedicated Machine Gun Battalion equipped with heavy Vickers machine guns. They were attached to the division to provide sustained, long-range fire support.
- **Raked:** To fire along the length of a target (sweeping fire). The Cheshires were firing "indirectly" over the heads of the Guards to suppress the enemy in the village ahead.
- **Troop carriers: Junkers Ju 52** transport aircraft.

Historical Context

The "Palm Sunday Massacre"
These entries record one of the most famous air battles of World War II, witnessed from the perspective of the infantry on the ground.

- **The Massacre:** Bernard writes: *"58 enemy troop-carrying planes shot down."* This refers to the event historically known as the **"Palm Sunday Massacre"** (April 18, 1943).
    - Desperate to reinforce their trapped army in Tunisia, the Germans were flying huge formations of slow Junkers Ju 52 transport planes from Sicily to Tunis.
    - Allied intelligence knew they were coming. Four squadrons of American P-40 Warhawks and British Spitfires ambushed the convoy near Cape Bon.
    - It was a slaughter. The Allied pilots shot down roughly 50–70 German transports and fighters (accounts vary, but Bernard's figure of 58 is remarkably accurate to the contemporary reports). This effectively strangled the Axis supply line.
- **The Battle of Enfidaville:** On the ground, the war was grinding on. The "N. Zealanders attacked at 11 P.M." refers to the assault on **Takrouna**, a steep rocky hill dominating the Enfidaville line. This was a brutal, close-quarters battle fought uphill.
- **Machine Gun Support:** The description of the "Cheshire's M.G." opening up is vivid. Machine gun battalions would set up "barrages" similar to artillery, firing millions of rounds in arcs over the heads of the attacking troops to keep the enemy heads down. The "deafening noise" of dozens of Vickers guns firing continuously for two hours would have been immense.
- **Health Hazards:** The repeated complaints about mosquitoes ("just ate us," "listless") highlight the environmental danger. The Enfidaville sector was marshy, and malaria was becoming a major casualty producer for the 8th Army, sometimes taking more men out of action than enemy fire.

Tuesday, April 20, 1943

Last objective surrendered to N. Zealanders at 9.0 A.M. 200 Germans. We moved up at about 2.0 P.M.

Road heavily shelled & dive bombed just as we got in Enfidaville. Must have been a beautiful village before shelling.

Took up position on right of N.Z.s & were heavily shelled. 5 Coy. vehicles hit. Eaton's truck went up on a mine.

Masquitoes seem to get worse, & are murder at night.

Wednesday, April 21, 1943

Stand-to & breakfast.

Enemy seen to have gone back slightly.

Rained during night, shelling easier during day.

Letter from Iris, which brightened things up no end. Wrote home in afternoon.

Bde. attached to N.Z.s.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Last objective:** This refers to the feature known as **Takrouna**. It was a steep, rocky pinnacle dominated by a fort and village. The **2nd New Zealand Division** (specifically the Maori Battalion) had scaled the cliffs in a legendary assault. The surrender of the garrison ("200 Germans") marked the end of the fight for that specific hill.
- **Eaton:** A fellow soldier in the unit. (Bernard mentioned "Eaton brewed up" on March 31st). "Went up on a mine" means the truck drove over a landmine and was destroyed or disabled.
- **Masquitoes:** (Mosquitoes). The spelling reflects the pronunciation. The Enfidaville line ran through marshy coastal ground, making malaria and insect bites ("murder at night") a major misery for the troops.
- **Bde.: Brigade**. The **201st Guards Brigade** was temporarily detached from its usual division and attached to the New Zealand Division to provide extra weight for the attack on the mountains.

Historical Context

The Fall of Takrouna
These entries confirm the 6th Battalion's role in the **Battle of Enfidaville**.

- **The Maori Feat:** The "Last objective surrendered... at 9.0 A.M" is a direct historical reference to the capture of **Takrouna**. The fighting for this rock had been brutal and hand-to-hand. The 200 Germans surrendering marks the collapse of that specific strongpoint.
- **Into the Ruins:** Moving into **Enfidaville** itself was terrifying. The Germans had retreated to the mountains overlooking the town, meaning they could look down and direct artillery fire onto anything moving on the road below. Bernard notes the "heavy shelling" and dive-bombing (Stukas) because the Guards were moving into a pre-sighted kill zone.
- **Loss of Transport:** losing "5 Coy. vehicles" and "Eaton's truck" in one afternoon was a serious logistical blow. It meant the soldiers lost their kit, ammunition reserves, and means of transport, forcing them to dig in where they stood.
- **Morale:** The contrast between the hellish conditions (mines, shelling, mosquitoes) and the effect of a single letter is striking. Receiving mail from **Iris** "brightened things up no end," reminding us of the immense psychological importance of the postal service (the Army Post Office) in keeping the army fighting.

Thursday, April 22, 1943

Comfortable night re. mosquitoes. Bites not so painful.

Moved forward 200x in morning & were heavily shelled. Shelling very concentrated but only two wounded in Coy. Grew was one. Three N. Zealanders killed. Was glad when it eased off a bit.

Wrote to Iris, John, & Terry.

Friday, April 23, 1943

Parcel came from home. Took five months to come, but was worth it. Socks, h'chiefs, Shavex, toilet soap & tooth paste. Made me feel good to know that Mother had packed it, & I had unpacked it, without anyone else touching it. Also letter from Iris dated Oct.

Stood to in afternoon for an hour. Said Stations of Cross in my Trench. Thought of how often I had done it at home.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **re.:** Regarding.
- **200x: 200 Yards**.
- **Grew:** Likely **Guardsman Grew**, a member of Bernard's company.
- **h'chiefs:** Handkerchiefs.
- **Shavex:** A popular British brand of "brushless" shaving cream sold during the war.
- **Stood to: Stand-to-arms**. The order to man the trenches and be ready for an attack.

- **Stations of Cross:** A Catholic devotional prayer series commemorating Jesus's walk to his crucifixion. This is traditionally prayed on **Good Friday**.

Historical Context

Good Friday in the Trenches
These entries provide a poignant contrast between the violence of the front line and the spiritual inner life of the soldier.

- **The Deadlock:** Moving forward only "200 yards" and sustaining "heavy shelling" illustrates the difficult nature of the Enfidaville line. The British were trying to push up into the hills, but the Germans had excellent observation from the peaks and could rain artillery on any movement. The death of the three New Zealanders emphasizes the shared cost of this battle.
- **The Parcel:** The arrival of a parcel from home was a major emotional event. The fact that it took **five months** suggests it was mailed back in November 1942 (around the time of El Alamein) and likely traveled the long sea route around South Africa to reach Tunisia.
- **A Touch of Home:** Bernard's comment—*"Made me feel good to know that Mother had packed it, & I had unpacked it, without anyone else touching it"*—is touching. In an army where everything is communal, issued, and censored, the physical connection of an object touched only by his mother provided a rare sense of intimacy and privacy.
- **Good Friday:** April 23, 1943, was **Good Friday**. It was also **St. George's Day** (the patron saint of England), which would usually be significant for an English regiment like the Grenadiers, but for Bernard, the religious significance took precedence. Praying the "Stations of the Cross" alone in a slit trench under shellfire is a vivid image of his faith sustaining him through the war.

Saturday, April 24, 1943

Moved up last night & are now in reserve, but below ground all day on account of enemy O.P.

Dead tired & slept most of day. Wanted a wash badly, but too tired.

First Army have started push & doing well. Cant get any more 'griff'.

Moved up again at 10 PM about 1000x. Long range shells on our left all night.

Jocks took about 40 prisoners.

Sunday, April 25, 1943

Shelling & mortaring much heavier at dawn & thought a counter-attack was coming.

Masquitoes very bad.

Sleep in morning.

Letter from Ted Leake.

Scores of our bombers across to Jerry & stopped his shelling.

Had lovely wash & shave & cleaned teeth.

Afternoon was very peaceful & seemed too good to be true. Wrote home.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **O.P.: Observation Post**. Because the Germans held the high ground in the mountains, they could see any movement on the plains below, forcing the British to stay "below ground" (in trenches) during daylight hours.
- **First Army:** This is a key strategic detail. While Bernard belonged to the **Eighth Army** (which had advanced all the way from Egypt), there was another British force, the **First Army**, which had landed in Algeria and was attacking Tunisia from the west. The two armies were now converging on Tunis. The "push" Bernard refers to is the final offensive (**Operation Vulcan**) launched by the First Army on April 22/23.
- **'Griff':** British Army slang for news, information, or the "lowdown" (similar to "dope").
- **1000x: 1000 Yards**.
- **Counter-attack:** A tactical response where the defending enemy attacks the attacking force. The heavy shelling at dawn was usually the precursor to this.

Historical Context

Easter in the Trenches
These entries mark **Easter Weekend 1943**, celebrated in a hole in the ground under artillery fire.

- **The Final Squeeze:** The mention of the **First Army** is significant. For months, the Eighth Army had been the "stars" of the desert war. Now, faced with the impassable mountains at Enfidaville, the Eighth Army's role became secondary—they were to exert pressure to pin the Germans down while the First Army smashed through the easier terrain in the north to capture Tunis. Bernard's note that they "Cant get any more griff" suggests he knows the main action is happening elsewhere.
- **Air Power Saves the Day:** On Easter Sunday, Bernard writes that "Scores of our bombers... stopped his shelling." This illustrates the utter dominance of Allied air power by this stage. Whenever German artillery opened up, Allied bombers would swarm the gun positions, silencing them and allowing the infantry a "peaceful" afternoon.
- **Basic Luxuries:** In the midst of war, the simple act of hygiene becomes a major event. Being able to wash, shave, and clean his teeth on Easter Sunday afternoon is described

as "lovely" and "too good to be true," highlighting how filthy the conditions in the trenches were.

Monday, April 26, 1943

Very quiet night much to our relief.

Air letter card from Ted Leake.

Morning fairly quiet. Several brews.

Had very interesting talk with Indian intelligence officer. Punjabi, & spoke very good English.

Wrote to Ted Leake.

Good wash & cleaned teeth.

Heard some news of First Army's battle. 67 tanks for 8. Good going.

Very near salvo of shells after dinner. We sent barrage over for 1½ hrs.

Tuesday, April 27, 1943

Day fairly quiet, but considerable shell fire from both sides. Our Air Force very active.

Very warm & couldnt sleep.

Went out on recce for new positions just before stand-to.

Moved into our new positions at 1.30 A.M.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Air letter card:** Similar to an Airgraph, this was a lightweight pre-stamped sheet of paper that folded into the shape of an envelope to save weight on aircraft.
- **Indian intelligence officer (Punjabi):** A commissioned officer from the **4th Indian Infantry Division**. This division, known as the "Red Eagles," was one of the most decorated units in the Eighth Army and was fighting right alongside the Guards at Enfidaville.
- **Salvo:** The simultaneous firing of a number of artillery guns.
- **Stand-to:** The daily dawn/dusk ritual of manning the trenches.

Historical Context

The Meeting of Empires and The Tank Battle
These entries capture the multicultural nature of the British war effort and the turning of the tide in the final days of the Tunisian campaign.

- **The "Red Eagles":** Bernard's encounter with the **Punjabi Intelligence Officer** is a reminder that the Eighth Army was a multinational force. The **4th Indian Division** played a crucial role in the North African campaign. At Enfidaville, their expertise in mountain warfare (honed on the North-West Frontier of India) was vital for navigating the steep crags that the motorized Guards struggled with. Bernard's comment ("spoke very good English") reflects the typical colonial mindset of the era, though he clearly respected the officer's intelligence role ("very interesting talk").
- **67 Tanks for 8:** This specific statistic refers to the massive armored clashes occurring in the **First Army's** sector (Operation Vulcan). On the Goubellat Plain, British Churchill and Sherman tanks were grinding down the last reserves of the German 10th Panzer Division. A kill ratio of "67 German tanks for 8 British tanks" was wildly optimistic propaganda (the actual exchange rate was rarely that good), but it served its purpose: keeping morale high among the troops stuck in the stalemate at Enfidaville.
- **The Strategic Picture:** Bernard notes "Our Air Force very active" and "considerable shell fire," yet describes the day as "fairly quiet." This is because the Eighth Army had been ordered to pause their main offensive. Their job now was simply to exert pressure and pin the Germans down at Enfidaville so they couldn't move troops north to stop the First Army's breakthrough to Tunis. Bernard is essentially holding the line while the knockout blow is delivered elsewhere.

Wednesday, April 28, 1943

Everything was laid on for tonight, but was put back for 24 hours.

Harry Cosson came up from B-Ech to see me.

Very warm & rained in afternoon.

French column made thrust North – rumoured they cut coast road.

Very good sleep at night. 56 Div. captured hill on our left front.

Thursday, April 29, 1943

Food is improving considerably as we near up First Army.

Sleep in morning & sweated all the time between blankets.

Germans counter-attacked with terrific mortar fire & re took the hill from 56 Div.

Went out on recce with Capt. Thorne for night attack, but put off again for 24 hours.

Full night's sleep & felt benefit of it.

Col. Clive came up to see us all.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Laid on:** British military slang for "organized" or "planned."
- **Put back:** Postponed.
- **Harry Cosson:** A fellow Sergeant (mentioned previously on Feb 11th).
- **B-Ech: B-Echelon**. A battalion is divided into "F-Echelon" (Fighting Echelon: the rifle companies, HQ, and essential combat support) and "B-Echelon" (the logistical tail: administrative staff, cooks, mechanics, and stores, kept a few miles to the rear for safety).
- **French column:** Forces of the **French XIX Corps**, which were fighting on the left flank of the Eighth Army.
- **56 Div.:** The **56th (London) Infantry Division**, nicknamed "The Black Cats." They had recently arrived in Tunisia and were fighting alongside the Guards at Enfidaville.
- **Col. Clive:** **Lieutenant-Colonel Archer Francis Lawrence Clive**. He was the Commanding Officer of the 6th Battalion Grenadier Guards at this time. It was common for the C.O. to visit the forward companies before a planned attack to boost morale.

Historical Context

The Squeeze on Tunis
The diary reflects the claustrophobic nature of the final phase of the campaign. The Axis forces are now compressed into a small pocket around Tunis, and the two Allied armies (First and Eighth) are physically meeting on the battlefield.

- **Logistical Relief:** The entry "Food is improving considerably as we near up First Army" is a fascinating logistical detail. The Eighth Army had traveled 2,000 miles from Egypt, and their supply lines were stretched to the breaking point. The First Army, supplied via the closer ports of Algiers and Bone, had better rations (including American tinned goods). As the two armies linked up, the "poor relations" of the Eighth Army began to benefit from the First Army's stockpiles.
- **The See-Saw Battle:** Bernard mentions **56th Division** capturing a hill and then the Germans "re took the hill" with "terrific mortar fire." This refers to the brutal fight for **Djebel Bouhhrina** (Point 141). The 56th Division took heavy casualties in this sector. The Germans were fighting desperately with their backs to the sea, launching immediate counter-attacks to regain any lost high ground.

- **Stop-Start Attacks:** The attack being "put back for 24 hours" twice in a row indicates high-level strategic shifting. General Alexander (Supreme Commander) was realizing that the Enfidaville mountains were too tough to crack frontally. He was in the process of shifting the main effort to the First Army sector to capture Tunis directly, leaving the Eighth Army (and Bernard) in a holding role to keep the Germans pinned down.

Friday, April 30, 1943

Morning comparatively quiet.

Commanding Officer wanted Sgt. Harrison & myself to give account of Mareth battle, but Jack on liaison for tonight.

Night attack cancelled & ready to move at 5.30 P.M.

Counter barrage went up 3.30 P.M. on lot of enemy's guns.

We pulled out at 11 P.M & went in trucks to half way to Sousse.

To bed at 2.30 A.M.

Saturday, May 1, 1943

Rev. 6.15 & it seemed like a holiday to relax & have socks off.

Moved off again 8 A.M. Lovely day & had brew up 12 noon.

Should have done 90 miles but only did 50 on account of heavy traffic on road.

Good sleep at night.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Sgt. Harrison: Serjeant Jack Harrison**. The same Jack Harrison mentioned in the March 22nd entry. The fact that the Commanding Officer specifically asked for Harrison and Bernard to "give account" confirms that they are the two senior survivors of the disastrous attack on the Horseshoe ridge. They are the only ones left with the rank and knowledge to explain what happened to the lost companies.
- **Mareth battle:** The **Battle of the Horseshoe** (March 16–17), where the battalion was decimated.
- **Liaison:** A duty involving coordinating between different units or headquarters.
- **Counter barrage:** Artillery fire directed specifically at the enemy's artillery positions (Counter-Battery fire) to suppress them.

- **Socks off:** A simple but vital luxury. Infantrymen rarely took their boots off in the line in case of a sudden attack. Removing boots and socks allowed feet to dry out and prevented "trench foot."
- **Brew up:** Making tea.

Historical Context

The Strategic Switch (Operation Strike)
These entries mark a major turning point in the final days of the African campaign.

- **Leaving the Eighth Army:** The entry "Night attack cancelled" and "We pulled out... to Sousse" indicates a massive strategic redeployment. General Alexander (Supreme Allied Commander) realized that the mountains at Enfidaville (where the Guards were) were too tough to crack. He decided to secretly move his best units—the **7th Armoured Division**, the **4th Indian Division**, and the **201st Guards Brigade** (Bernard's unit)—away from the Eighth Army front.
- **The Move North:** They were ordered to travel south (to Sousse) and then swing west and north to join the **First Army** in the Medjez-el-Bab sector. This was done to provide a "sledgehammer" for the final drive on Tunis across the flat plains, where tanks could be used effectively.
- **Traffic Jams:** The "heavy traffic on road" mentioned on May 1st was the result of thousands of vehicles (tanks, trucks, and transporters) shifting from one army to another in a matter of days. This massive movement of troops was the final maneuver that would lead to the fall of Tunis just one week later.
- **The Ghost of Mareth:** It is significant that even amidst this major move, the "Commanding Officer" (Col. Clive) is still trying to piece together the "account of Mareth battle." The loss of so many men in March was a trauma the battalion was still administratively and emotionally processing.

Sunday, May 2, 1943

Still on our journey round to First Army & saw quite a few French civilians including several girls. Plenty Yanks, & they all wanted German souvenirs especially pistols, for which they would give £15.

Put rifle oil in my tea instead of rum.

Feel about ten times better than when we were in the line.

Monday, May 3, 1943

Was informed I was taking over Mortar Pl.

Had good wash & did some clothes.

Started off again at 11 A.M & arrived South of Medjez-el-Bab. Very high up in hills.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Yanks:** American soldiers.
- **German pistols:** Highly prized war trophies, specifically the **Luger P08** or **Walther P38**. Veterans of the Eighth Army, who had been fighting for years, had collected many of these. The Americans, who were newer to the war and better paid, were eager buyers.
- **£15:** This was a significant amount of money in 1943—roughly equivalent to a month's pay for a senior NCO. It illustrates the thriving black market between the battle-hardened eighth army and the wealthy G.I.s.
- **Mortar Pl.: Mortar Platoon**. A support platoon equipped with 3-inch mortars to provide indirect fire support for the infantry. Taking over this platoon was a position of significant responsibility, usually held by a Captain or a very senior Sergeant.
- **Medjez-el-Bab:** A key strategic town in Tunisia ("The Gate"). It controlled the main road and valley leading directly to Tunis.

Historical Context

The Meeting of Armies and The Final Push
These entries document the cultural collision between the two Allied armies and the final positioning for the end of the war in Africa.

- **The "Market" Forces:** The interaction with the "Yanks" is a classic moment of WWII social history. The British Eighth Army soldiers were ragged, dusty, and cynical, but they possessed the "kudos" of having defeated Rommel. The Americans were fresh, well-equipped, and had money. Bernard's note about the £15 price tag for a pistol shows how the British soldiers cashed in on their combat experience.
- **A Soldier's Mistake:** The incident of putting **"rifle oil in my tea instead of rum"** is a grimly funny human error. In the dark, or due to exhaustion, mistaking a flask of oil for a flask of rum would have been a disgusting shock.
- **The Final Staging Area:** Arriving **"South of Medjez-el-Bab"** places the 6th Battalion exactly where General Alexander wanted them. They were now poised to launch **Operation Strike**, the final offensive to capture Tunis. They had been moved from the stalemate of the mountains in the south to the valleys of the north, where the terrain was suitable for a massive armored breakthrough.
- **New Command:** Bernard "taking over Mortar Platoon" suggests that despite the influx of replacements mentioned in April, the battalion was still short of experienced officers. Relying on a Sergeant (Bernard) to command a specialist platoon for the final battle demonstrates the high regard in which he was held by his superiors.

Tuesday, May 4, 1943

Reformed Bn. & I took over Mortar Pl. Pl. seems O.K. except for a few untrained men.

Saw several old 3rd. Bn including Niffy Hill who I last saw at Windsor.

Quite a lot of work to do in Pl.

Felt tired at night & bed at 9 P.M.

Wednesday, May 5, 1943

Pl. went out for a shoot & we did well.

Capt. Thorne doing unnecessary interfering. Copestake put bomb in upside down & took some clearing. Capt. Thorne told me to control my tongue for some remarks I made.

Conference & had details for the do. Decent night's sleep.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Reformed Bn.: Reformed Battalion**. After the heavy losses at the Horseshoe and the reorganization during the move north, the battalion is settling into its final fighting structure.
- **Old 3rd. Bn / Windsor:** The **3rd Battalion, Grenadier Guards**. They were not in Tunisia (they were in the UK preparing for Italy). Bernard is meeting old friends he served with during peacetime duties at **Windsor Castle** who have been drafted in as reinforcements to fill the gaps in the 6th Battalion.
- **Niffy Hill:** A fellow soldier. "Niffy" was a common nickname, often ironic (implying a smell), or simply a term of endearment.
- **Shoot:** A live-fire practice exercise.
- **Copestake:** A soldier in the platoon (likely a Private/Guardsman).
- **Bomb in upside down:** A mortar bomb is teardrop-shaped with a percussion cartridge in the tail. It is dropped tail-first down the tube to hit the firing pin at the bottom. Putting it in "upside down" (nose first) means it won't fire, it gets stuck, and it is extremely dangerous and difficult to remove ("took some clearing"). This confirms Bernard's fear about the "untrained men."
- **The do:** British slang for a party, event, or in this case, **the battle/attack**.

Historical Context

Tension in the Ranks and The Final Error
These entries offer a vivid picture of pre-battle stress and the friction between experienced NCOs and officers.

- **The Incident:** The "bomb upside down" incident is a classic example of a rookie mistake that could have been fatal. In the middle of a live-fire exercise, having to carefully extract a live explosive from a mortar tube because a nervous replacement soldier ("untrained men") dropped it in backward would have been terrifying.
- **Insubordination:** The conflict with Captain Thorne is fascinating. Bernard, a battle-hardened Sergeant who has survived the Horseshoe and commanded a platoon in combat, clearly felt the officer was "interfering."
    - When Bernard made "remarks" (likely shouting at Copestake), Thorne reprimanded him to **"control my tongue."**
    - This shows the strain on the chain of command. The NCOs (like Bernard) felt they knew how to run the war better than the officers, especially after the disasters they had lived through in March.
- **The Eve of Attack:** The mention of receiving "details for the do" refers to the briefing for **Operation Strike**, the final Allied assault on Tunis. The 6th Battalion was about to attack the **Bou Aoukaz** (The Bou) feature. This would be the final, decisive battle of the North African campaign for the Grenadier Guards.

Thursday, May 6, 1943

Moved about 8.45 A.M in N.W. direction. Rd. was very dusty.

Heard at 11 A.M. that our infantry had captured all objectives & armour was on way to Tunis.

Saw 3rd. Bn. in afternoon & had chat to some of them. Enemy started shelling our route.

Very dark night & control very difficult. Truck hit large rock & we had to stay there till morning.

Friday, May 7, 1943

Good brew up & breakfast next morning & transferred our kit to a Portee & moved up to Bn. positions.

Very quiet to say it was a big push.

Enemy seems to be on run. Our R.A.F. bombers at him all the morning.

Lay down in afternoon.

Moved about 4.30 P.M. & it rained very heavy. Close leagured.

Tunis fell to 7th. Armoured Div.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Rd.:** Road.
- **Objectives:** Specific geographic points (hills, trenches, junctions) that the infantry were ordered to capture to open the way for the tanks.
- **3rd. Bn.: 3rd Battalion, Coldstream Guards**. They were the sister battalion to Bernard's 6th Grenadiers within the 201st Guards Brigade.
- **Control very difficult:** Driving a convoy in pitch darkness ("Very dark night") without headlights makes keeping the trucks together and on the road nearly impossible.
- **Portee:** A specialized truck with a modified flatbed designed to carry a heavy weapon (like an anti-tank gun or a **3-inch mortar**) and its crew. Since Bernard had just taken command of the Mortar Platoon, they would travel on these vehicles.
- **Big push:** Slang for a major, decisive offensive.
- **Close leagured:** Parking the vehicles tightly together for the night.

Historical Context

The Fall of Tunis
These entries document the victorious climax of the North African campaign.

- **Operation Strike:** On the morning of May 6, 1943, the final Allied offensive began. The infantry (British 4th and Indian 4th Divisions) smashed a hole in the Axis defenses at Medjez-el-Bab. Bernard notes hearing at 11 A.M. that "infantry had captured all objectives." This allowed the armour to pass through the gap.
- **The Race to the Capital:** Bernard writes: *"Armour was on way to Tunis."* Once the shell of the German defense was broken, there was nothing behind it. The British tanks raced towards the capital, leaving the infantry (like Bernard) to follow in their wake.
- **"Very quiet to say it was a big push":** This observation highlights how completely the German defenses had collapsed. Unlike the grinding battles of Mareth or Enfidaville, the resistance here had evaporated under the weight of the massive Allied bombardment.
- **Victory:** The final line of the Friday entry is historic: **"Tunis fell to 7th Armoured Div."**
    - On the afternoon of May 7, 1943, the armoured cars of the 11th Hussars and the tanks of the 7th Armoured Division entered Tunis.
    - Simultaneously, the Americans captured Bizerte in the north.
    - This marked the end of the Axis presence in Africa. Although some pockets of Germans would fight on for a few more days on the Cap Bon peninsula, the strategic war was won on this day.

Saturday, May 8, 1943

Moved again at 2.15 & took up position rear of hill. Very good positions for mortars.

Eaton & Jarrett brought cases of kit from German dump. Gave me three shirts & vests. Coy. Comdr. worries unnecessary about defence routine.

Moved at 2.15 P.M. Arrived new position about ten miles from Tunis. Planes still bombing.

Good drink of wine.

Sunday, May 9, 1943

Rev 5.30 & breakfast.

Drew two days rations at an hours notice to move.

Letter from Terry & answered it.

75,000 prisoners taken.

Our Bombers & fighters still going over to enemy.

Fowler came out of hospital, & told me about Dalton.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **German dump:** A supply depot or stockpile abandoned by the retreating German army. As the Axis forces collapsed, they left behind vast quantities of high-quality clothing, food, and equipment.
- **Kit:** Military clothing and equipment. German shirts and vests were often of better quality than the British issue, so they were prized "souvenirs" for soldiers to wear.
- **Coy. Comdr.: Company Commander**. Bernard continues to show frustration with officers ("worries unnecessary")—a common sentiment for a battle-weary NCO who feels the war is practically won and sees strict defensive routines as a waste of time.
- **Dalton: Serjeant Dalton**. This refers back to the entry of **March 16, 1943** (Battle of the Horseshoe), where Bernard wrote: *"Sgt. Dalton hit in face & to R.A.P. This made me Pl. Comdr."*
- **Fowler:** A fellow soldier returning to the unit after recovering from wounds.
- **Eaton:** A soldier in Bernard's platoon (previously mentioned brewing tea on March 31 and losing his truck on April 20).

Historical Context

The Great Surrender
These entries depict the chaotic and triumphant final days of the war in Africa.

- **The Collapse of the Axis:** The figure **"75,000 prisoners taken"** is historic. Following the fall of Tunis on May 7, the German and Italian armies in North Africa disintegrated. Trapped against the sea with no fuel, no ammunition, and no way to evacuate to Sicily, they surrendered en masse. The final total of prisoners taken in Tunisia (over 230,000) famously exceeded the number captured at Stalingrad.
- **Ten Miles from Victory:** Being "ten miles from Tunis" meant the battalion was sitting in the suburbs of the capital, watching the end of the campaign.
- **Spoils of War:** The entry about "Eaton & Jarrett" raiding a German dump illustrates the breakdown of discipline in the flush of victory. Scavenging enemy supplies for "shirts & vests" or "wine" was a standard reward for the troops who had survived the desert crossing.
- **Closure:** The return of **Fowler** from the hospital bringing news of **Dalton** provides narrative closure for Bernard. Since March 16, he likely hadn't known if Dalton survived his facial wound. This conversation connects the survivors of the disaster at the Horseshoe with the victory at Tunis.

Monday, May 10, 1943

Moved at 4.30 A.M. towards Tunis & turned off one mile from it towards Grombalia. 2 mortars attached to 4 Coy.

Coy. advanced in two halves & Germans surrendered. Prisoners coming in all day.

Russian still on offensive.

Got some kit from captured armoured cars.

Moved again at dark & travelled all night towards east end of Cape Bon.

Tuesday, May 11, 1943

Took up positions between two German Armies & dug mortars in.

Very hot day & had some very good cooked meals.

Enemy in Cape Bon gave up during morning. Had celebration drink of wine & lemon.

Had first decent wash for over a fortnight.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Grombalia:** A town southeast of Tunis. It sits at the base of the Cap Bon peninsula. The British strategy was to seize this town to block the retreating Germans from fleeing into the peninsula to make a final stand.
- **4 Coy.: No. 4 Company**. Bernard's Mortar Platoon had split up its sections to support the different rifle companies.
- **Halves:** The Company advanced in two groups.
- **Kit:** Equipment or, more accurately in this context, **loot/souvenirs**. Soldiers often raided captured vehicles for binoculars, Lugers, food, and clothing.
- **Cape Bon (Cap Bon):** The peninsula in northeastern Tunisia. It was the final refuge for the Axis forces.
- **Between two German Armies:** This refers to the **5th Panzer Army** (in the north around Tunis) and the **1st Italian Army** (in the south at Enfidaville). The British breakthrough to the sea at Grombalia had sliced the Axis forces in two, preventing them from linking up.
- **Fortnight:** Two weeks. This confirms the relentless pace of the advance since late April; they had been moving or fighting constantly without access to showers or laundry.

Historical Context

The Trap Snaps Shut
These entries cover the final 48 hours of the North African campaign.

- **The Cut-Off:** The movement description—*"towards Tunis & turned off... towards Grombalia... towards east end of Cape Bon"*—is a precise account of the "coup de grâce" maneuver. General Alexander ordered the 6th Armoured Division and the 201st Guards Brigade to bypass Tunis and race for the neck of the Cap Bon peninsula. Their job was to put a "cork in the bottle" so the Germans couldn't retreat into the mountains of the peninsula and prolong the war.
- **Mass Surrender:** The phrase *"Germans surrendered. Prisoners coming in all day"* illustrates the total collapse of the enemy's will to fight. The Allies captured over 230,000 prisoners in Tunisia—a disaster for Germany on the scale of Stalingrad.
- **Looting the Wreckage:** Getting *"kit from captured armoured cars"* implies the German convoys were driving straight into the British roadblocks and surrendering intact. This was a field day for British troops, who liberated German rations, chocolate, and equipment.
- **The End:** On Tuesday, May 11, Bernard notes *"Enemy in Cape Bon gave up during morning."* While the formal surrender of General Messe would happen on May 13th, for the 6th Grenadiers, the war in Africa effectively ended on this Tuesday morning with a "celebration drink of wine & lemon." They had cut the peninsula, found no resistance, and could finally wash the desert off their skin.

Wednesday, May 12, 1943

Nothing on in morning. Moved at 12.30 p.m towards Enfidaville, & took up position in A/T role.

Saw Tommy Lythgoe & several of 3rd. Bn. in afternoon.

General Von Arnim came into our lines to discuss terms of surrender. Proposal rejected & stand-to order.

Coy. Comdr. very awkward about 'phone on O.P.

Thursday, May 13, 1943

Heard that fighting in N. Africa had ceased. Somehow, everybody was too browned off to cheer.

Had lovely swim in sea at 8 A.M.

Collecting enemy materials.

Ready to move at 1 PM.

Went into close leaque at 3.30 P.M. & went for another swim.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **A/T role: Anti-Tank role**. The battalion deployed its anti-tank guns in case the trapped Axis forces tried a desperate armored breakout.
- **Tommy Lythgoe:** A fellow soldier. He was previously mentioned in the **February 1st** entry as being "hurt with truck." His presence here confirms he recovered and rejoined the unit for the end of the campaign.
- **3rd. Bn.: 3rd Battalion, Coldstream Guards**.
- **General Von Arnim:** Colonel-General Hans-Jürgen von Arnim. He was the Commander-in-Chief of Army Group Africa (Rommel's successor). He was the highest-ranking German officer in Africa.
- **Coy. Comdr.: Company Commander**. The friction between Bernard (the veteran Sergeant) and his officer continues to the very last day of the war over the technical placement of a field telephone.
- **Browned off:** Slang for being fed up, depressed, or exhausted.
- **Leaque:** Bernard's spelling of **Leaguer** (defensive parking formation).

Historical Context

"Too Browned Off to Cheer": The End of the African War
These entries record the exact moment the North African Campaign ended (May 13, 1943), after three years of fighting.

- **The Capture of Von Arnim:** Bernard's diary bears witness to a major historical event. On May 12, General von Arnim surrendered to the 4th Indian Division (who were

operating alongside the Guards). Bernard notes that the initial "terms of surrender" were "rejected." This aligns with the Allied policy of **Unconditional Surrender** set at Casablanca. The Allies would accept nothing less than total capitulation.

- **The Anti-Climax:** The entry for May 13 is an understatement. *"Heard that fighting in N. Africa had ceased. Somehow, everybody was too browned off to cheer."*
    - There were no parades or parties immediately. The soldiers were physically and mentally shattered. They had advanced 2,000 miles, lost hundreds of friends (especially at the Horseshoe), and lived in holes in the ground for months. The reaction was relief and exhaustion, not joy.
- **The Final Routine:** Even on the day victory is declared, the army routine continues: collecting "enemy materials" (looting/salvage), moving to a "close leaguer," and swimming. The war in Africa was over; the battalion would now rest before preparing for the invasion of Italy.

Friday, May 14, 1943

Talk by the Commanding Officer to Bn on our part of the fighting & just a bit of the future.

Kit & weapons check up & went for swim. Water was chilly but very enjoyable.

Joe Challinor came to Pl. from hospital.

Letter from Iris.

Saturday, May 15, 1943

Jock called round for me in Jerry car & took me to Tunis.

Had some wine at a French house & went to the Cathedral. It was beautiful inside & also some lovely girls were there.

Left about 5.15 P.M. & back by 6.45.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Joe Challinor:** A fellow soldier and friend of Bernard's. Mentioned way back in the **January 11th** entry during the leave in Beirut. He has evidently recovered from sickness or wounds and rejoined the unit now that the fighting has stopped.
- **Jock:** Likely **Jock Walker**, mentioned in the entries for February 7th and 12th.
- **Jerry car:** A captured German vehicle (likely a Volkswagen Kübelwagen or a staff car). In the chaotic days following the surrender, Allied soldiers frequently commandeered abandoned German vehicles for personal transport and joyriding.

- **The Cathedral:** The **Cathedral of St. Vincent de Paul** in Tunis. It is a striking mixture of Moorish and Gothic styles, situated at the intersection of Avenue de France and Avenue Habib Bourguiba.

Historical Context

Victory Tours and Reunions
With the war in Africa officially over (as of May 13), the diary shifts immediately to the atmosphere of relief, reunion, and tourism.

- **The C.O.'s Address:** The Commanding Officer's speech was a standard military procedure at the end of a campaign. He would have praised the 6th Battalion for their resilience at the Mareth Line (The Horseshoe) and their success at Enfidaville. The mention of "a bit of the future" was likely vague; the troops didn't yet know they would eventually be training for the invasion of Italy (Salerno).
- **The Spoils of War:** Driving into the conquered capital of Tunis in a "Jerry car" was the ultimate status symbol for a veteran of the Eighth Army. It showed they were the victors.
- **Civilian Life Returns:** Drinking wine in a "French house" and noticing "lovely girls" at the Cathedral shows the soldiers reconnecting with civilian society after months of isolation in the desert.
- **The Band of Brothers:** The return of **Joe Challinor** from the hospital is a significant moment for Bernard. Throughout the diary, we have seen men leave (wounded/killed) and "nucleus" platoons formed to cover the gaps. Now, the survivors are trickling back, and the unit is becoming whole again.

Sunday, May 16, 1943

To mass at Hammamet at 9 am : & it was a beautiful church if small. Some lovely statues & painting.

Swimming & reading in afternoon.

Warm day with a cool breeze.

Monday, May 17, 1943

C.O.’s Drill pde. in preparation for march past at Tunis.

Went for treatment with inflamed hand through cactus thorns.

Had letter from Terry & two snaps, both of which were beautiful.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Hammamet:** A coastal town in Tunisia, located at the south-eastern base of the Cap Bon peninsula. It is famous for its beaches, making it an ideal rest area for the troops after the campaign.
- **C.O.'s Drill pde.: Commanding Officer's Drill Parade**. A formal inspection and marching practice overseen by the Battalion Commander personally. This indicates a high-stakes ceremonial event was coming up.
- **March past:** A ceremonial parade where troops march in formation past a saluting base containing high-ranking officers (Generals, politicians, etc.).
- **Cactus thorns:** The Prickly Pear cactus is ubiquitous in the Tunisian countryside. In the dark or during tactical movement, soldiers frequently ran into them. An infected ("inflamed") cactus spine wound was a common, if minor, ailment in the theater.

Historical Context

Victory Parades and The Mediterranean Coast
The war is over, and the diary reflects the shift from survival to ceremony.

- **The Tunis Victory March:** The "preparation for march past at Tunis" refers to the massive **Allied Victory Parade** that would take place on **May 20, 1943**. General Eisenhower and General Giraud (French commander) reviewed the troops. As the Grenadier Guards were the senior regiment of the Foot Guards, their drill standards were expected to be impeccable; hence the C.O. holding rigorous practice parades even after the fighting had stopped.
- **Rest and Refit:** The unit is stationed in **Hammamet**, a resort town. The juxtaposition of "Swimming & reading" with the frantic trench digging of the previous month shows how quickly the soldiers' lives had changed.
- **Minor Injuries:** The mention of going for medical treatment for "cactus thorns" highlights the change in danger levels. A few weeks prior, Bernard was dodging mortar fire and navigating minefields; now, his biggest physical complaint is an infected hand from a plant.

Tuesday, May 18, 1943

Went for treatment for hand again & nothing else on in morning.

Wrote to Kay & Iris.

Day was very windy & cold. Didn't go for swim.

Bought half bottle of whisky for 4/3 & had good drink before bed.

Asleep straight away.

Wednesday, May 19, 1943

Reveille 5.30 A.M & sorted ammunition out & handed surplus in.

Ready to move at 2 hrs notice for P.O.W. Gd.

Started off about 10 AM & set a good pace through Medjez el Bab, Beja, on the way to Bone. Some interesting scenery, especially villages in the moon light.

Leagured at 10.15 & down to it after decent drink of whiskey. To sleep almost straight away.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Treatment for hand:** Refers to the "inflamed hand through cactus thorns" mentioned in the previous day's entry (May 17).
- **4/3: 4 Shillings and 3 Pence**. A very reasonable price for a half-bottle of whisky, likely purchased through the NAAFI or officers' mess stores rather than the local black market.
- **Handed surplus in:** During the fighting, soldiers hoarded as much ammunition as they could carry, often exceeding the official issue. Now that the campaign was over, all extra rounds had to be returned to the Quartermaster for accounting.
- **P.O.W. Gd.: Prisoner of War Guard**. With over 230,000 Axis soldiers surrendering in Tunisia, guarding and transporting them became the primary task for the combat units.
- **Medjez el Bab / Beja / Bone:** These are towns on the road heading **West**, away from Tunis and back towards Algeria.
    - **Medjez el Bab:** The site of the breakthrough battle.
    - **Beja:** A market town in the Tell Atlas mountains.
    - **Bone:** The French name for **Annaba**, a major port city on the coast of Algeria.
- **Down to it:** British slang for settling down to sleep.

Historical Context

The March of the Captives
These entries mark a reversal of direction. After fighting their way East to Tunis, the battalion is now driving West back towards Algeria.

- **The Prisoner Problem:** The Allies had captured a quarter of a million German and Italian troops—an unexpected number that overwhelmed logistical planning. Combat units like the Grenadier Guards were immediately repurposed to escort these massive columns of prisoners from the front lines in Tunisia to the ports in Algeria (like Bone) for shipment to prison camps in the US and UK.
- **Battlefield Tourism:** Driving through **Medjez el Bab** would have been poignant for Bernard. He had arrived there on May 3rd to prepare for the final attack. Now, driving back through it in peace, he notes the "interesting scenery," viewing the landscape as a traveler rather than a soldier looking for targets.

- **De-escalation:** The routine of "sorting ammunition" and handing it in signifies the psychological end of the campaign. The killing is done; now it is time to count the bullets and guard the vanquished. The nightly ritual of a "decent drink of whiskey" suggests a man trying to unwind after months of high-adrenaline stress.

Thursday, May 20, 1943

Up at 6 A.M. & away at 7.50. Did the remaining distance to Bone by 9 A.M.

Leagured in Transit camp site & hung on until evening. Met a fellow from Kilkenny.

P.O.W. Gd. mounted at 6.30 P.M. I mounted night Gd. at 7.30 P.M.

Not too bad during night.

Friday, May 21, 1943

Was on bathing duty from 9–12 noon. Had a lovely time.

Went to Bone in the afternoon with Lew & Watson. Had few drinks & saw "Wake Island".

Walk round Town after & went to Benediction. Lovely church inside.

Left at 8 P.M. & had dinner & went to bed.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Bone:** The French colonial name for **Annaba**, a major city and port in northeastern Algeria. It was a critical Allied supply hub and the embarkation point for prisoners of war being shipped out of Africa.
- **Transit camp:** A temporary camp used to house troops moving between locations. It usually consists of tents and basic facilities, lacking the permanence of a base or the defensive nature of a frontline position.
- **Kilkenny:** A county in Ireland. Although Ireland was neutral during WWII ("The Emergency"), tens of thousands of Irish men volunteered to serve in the British forces.
- **P.O.W. Gd.: Prisoner of War Guard**. The battalion's primary role now was guarding the thousands of German and Italian prisoners waiting for transport ships.
- **Bathing duty:** An organized swimming parade. Given that Bernard "had a lovely time," this was likely supervising his own men swimming in the sea for hygiene and recreation, rather than guarding prisoners washing.
- **Lew & Watson:** Fellow soldiers in the unit.

- **"Wake Island" (1942):** An American war film recounting the Battle of Wake Island, where US Marines held out against the Japanese. It was a major morale-boosting film released shortly after the actual event.
- **Benediction:** A Catholic evening service.

Historical Context

From Conquerors to Gaolers
These entries show the battalion settling into a rear-echelon role in Algeria after the victory in Tunisia.

- **The Reality of Victory:** Instead of a glorious return home, the immediate reward for the victors of the North African campaign was guard duty. The logistics of processing over 200,000 Axis prisoners were staggering. The 6th Battalion was stationed at Bone to ensure the prisoners were loaded onto ships securely.
- **The Irish Volunteer:** The mention of meeting "a fellow from Kilkenny" is a small but significant social history detail. It highlights the diverse makeup of the British Army. Despite Ireland's neutrality, many Irishmen crossed the border or the Irish Sea to enlist, often finding camaraderie with Catholic British soldiers like Bernard.
- **Hollywood at War:** Watching *"Wake Island"* is an interesting cultural intersection. British soldiers, fresh from defeating the Germans in the desert, were consuming American media about the war against Japan in the Pacific. It reminded them that the war was global and far from over.
- **Return to Routine:** The structure of the day—Guard duty, organized bathing, cinema, church, and dinner—resembles the "peacetime" entries from January in Syria. The frantic pace of the advance, the digging, and the shelling have ceased, replaced by the mundane duties of an occupation army.

Saturday, May 22, 1943

Wrote home & to Terry.

Went for swim in afternoon & had a lovely time. Saw Bernard Fleming.

Was going to go in again at night, but mosquitoes made it uncomfortable.

Got warned for escort to P.O.W. at 11 P.M.

Sunday, May 23, 1943

Up at 5 A.M. & left for P.O.W. camp & took 1,000 Italian Marines to docks & on to ship. Prisoners were paying 500 francs for ten cigarettes = £5. German prisoners wouldn't parley with any one.

Didn't have any breakfast & back for lunch at 1.30 P.M.

Nothing in afternoon so did washing.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Warned:** In military language, this does not mean a threat. A "Warning Order" or being "warned for duty" is the official notification that you have been selected for a specific task or mission.
- **Italian Marines:** Most likely the **San Marco Regiment**. This was an elite Italian naval infantry unit that fought with distinction in Tunisia. The fact that they were moved as a specific block of 1,000 men suggests the Allies kept unit cohesion even in captivity.
- **Parley:** To speak, discuss, or negotiate. Bernard notes the stark difference in attitude: the Italians were trading and talking, while the Germans remained aloof, disciplined, and hostile.
- **500 francs... = £5:** The French Franc was the currency of Algeria/Tunisia. The prisoners knew their occupation currency would be worthless once they reached the prison camps in the UK or USA, so they were desperate to trade it for "hard" goods like cigarettes before boarding the ships.
    - *Context:* £5 was a significant sum in 1943 (roughly equivalent to a week's wages for a skilled tradesman). Selling a packet of 10 cigarettes for that amount shows the hyper-inflation of the black market at the docks.

Historical Context

The Exodus of the Defeated
These entries provide a fascinating sociological glimpse into the end of the campaign.

- **The Great Sort:** The Allies had to move a quarter of a million prisoners out of Africa. The 6th Grenadiers were acting as the funnel at the port of Bone (Annaba). Moving "1,000 Italian Marines" before breakfast gives a sense of the industrial scale of this operation.
- **Axis Rivalry:** Bernard observes the split between the Axis partners even in defeat. The Italians, often treated poorly by their German allies and tired of the war, were willing to engage with the British guards. The Germans, particularly the Afrika Korps veterans, often maintained a haughty silence ("wouldn't parley"), viewing themselves as undefeated soldiers who had only lost due to lack of supplies.
- **War Profiteering:** The cigarette trade at the docks was legendary. British soldiers, who had access to cheap or free cigarettes, could make small fortunes off the desperate prisoners. The prisoners were about to undergo a long sea voyage and knew tobacco would be scarce, while their French currency was about to be confiscated or become useless paper. Bernard recording the exact exchange rate suggests he was quite impressed by the economics of the situation.

Monday, May 24, 1943

Left camp on P.O.W. Gd. at 5.45 A.M. Prisoners came on ship about 7 A.M.

On the go all day sorting numbers & rations out.

Out into Bone for a drink. Pulled out about 8 P.M. Enemy raid on town just as we pulled out. Didn't come near ship though.

Tuesday, May 25, 1943

During the voyage to Oran, there was quite a lot of sickness among prisoners, chiefly, sea-sickness. They were very easy to get on with on whole & were glad they were prisoners. Had their own little concerts on board & played accordion very good.

Guard was easy enough, but ship was very dirty.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Oran:** A major port city in northwestern Algeria. This indicates a significant journey westwards, moving the prisoners from the forward transit camps to the deeper rear-echelon holding areas or onto ocean-going liners for transport to the USA/UK.
- **Sorting numbers:** Organizing the prisoners by rank, unit, or serial number for accountability before sailing.
- **Enemy raid:** An air raid by the Luftwaffe. Even though the Axis armies in Africa had surrendered, German bombers from Sicily or Italy could still reach the Algerian ports to disrupt Allied shipping.

Historical Context

The Accordion on the Prisoner Ship
These entries describe the logistical aftermath of the victory. The 6th Battalion has temporarily become a prison-transport unit.

- **The Relief of Defeat:** Bernard's observation that the prisoners "were glad they were prisoners" is a telling psychological insight. After years of desert warfare and the final collapse in the Cape Bon pocket, the German and Italian soldiers were relieved to be out of the war, fed, and safe. The fact that they organized "concerts" and played the accordion on the deck of a dirty transport ship shows a return to humanity after the brutality of the campaign.
- **Sea Sickness:** The Mediterranean can be rough, and transport ships were often overcrowded and ill-stabilized cargo vessels. With "quite a lot of sickness" among thousands of men in confined spaces, the comment that the "ship was very dirty" is likely an understatement.

- **Moving West:** By sailing to **Oran**, the battalion is moving hundreds of miles away from the Tunisian battlefields. They are effectively leaving the war zone for a period of rest and refit before the next invasion (Italy).

Wednesday, May 26, 1943

Called at Algiers, but stayed anchored in harbour.

Rations were not very good & prisoners would give almost anything for bread or any food.

Felt a bit sea-sick myself, but only for one night.

Thursday, May 27, 1943

During voyage, was reading a very good book, The Ordeal of Richard Feverel.

Arrived at Oran at about 8 P.M. & left ship about 11 P.M & went straight to a truck where we went to a Stn. about 40 miles from Oran & caught a train. Everybody was pushed for room.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Algiers:** The capital city of Algeria. It was the Allied Headquarters for the North African theater. Staying "anchored in harbour" suggests the ship was just stopping for orders or fuel and wasn't offloading the prisoners there.
- **Stn.:** Abbreviation for **Station** (Railway Station).
- **"The Ordeal of Richard Feverel":** A Victorian novel by George Meredith, published in 1859. Soldiers often read whatever books were donated or available in camp libraries, leading to a mix of pulp fiction and heavy classics.

Historical Context

The Long Journey Back
These entries document the battalion's movement away from the war zone to a new staging area in Western Algeria.

- **Prisoner Misery:** The entry "prisoners would give almost anything for bread" highlights the logistical strain of the victory. The Allies were overwhelmed by the number of Axis troops surrendering (over 230,000). Feeding them on crowded transport ships was a major challenge, and hunger was prevalent. The German and Italian troops were now experiencing the privation they had inflicted on others.
- **Strategic Redeployment:** Moving from **Tunisia** (East) all the way back to **Oran** (West) was a significant strategic move. The 6th Battalion Grenadier Guards, having been battered in the Mareth Line and Enfidaville battles, was being pulled out of the line

completely. They were heading to a training area to rebuild, receive reinforcements, and prepare for their next major campaign: the invasion of Italy (specifically Salerno), which would take place in September 1943.
- **The Cattle Cars:** The final note "Everybody was pushed for room" on the train refers to the standard mode of military rail transport in North Africa: "40 men or 8 horses" boxcars (known as *Hommes 40/Chevaux 8*). It was an uncomfortable end to a long sea voyage.

Friday, May 28, 1943

Had diarrhoea very bad on train, but apart from that, the scenery was very good. Had Yank rations for the day.

Arrived Algiers station about 9.30 & got to Transit camp about 11 P.M.

Bit of supper & mug of tea & down to sleep straight away.

Saturday, May 29, 1943

Dead tired at Rev. but had a hot shower & felt lovely.

Went into Algiers with Jack Harrison & saw most of the town.

The girls are beautiful especially from 16–23. Wish I could speak French, I may have made a friendship with one. Their eyes linger on you for quite a while & it makes one think of girls you took out in England & Durban.

Had some very good drinks, very good coffee as well.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Yank rations:** American army field rations (likely C-Rations or K-Rations). British soldiers often envied these because they contained "luxuries" like candy, chewing gum, cigarettes, and toilet paper, and offered more variety than the standard British "bully beef" and hardtack biscuits.
- **Durban:** A major port city in South Africa. As mentioned in the **January 9th** entry, the troop convoy carrying the battalion from England to the Middle East had stopped in Durban for shore leave. Bernard is reminiscing about the romances of his journey.

Historical Context

Rest, Recreation, and Reflection
The diary has shifted completely from a war journal to a travelogue of a soldier on leave.

- **Logistical Shuffle:** It seems the battalion took a ship to Oran (as per the previous entry) only to immediately board a train back to **Algiers**. While this seems inefficient, Algiers was the main transit hub.
- **The "Universal Soldier":** Bernard's lament about the language barrier ("Wish I could speak French") and his appreciation of the local women ("Their eyes linger on you") is a timeless aspect of military service abroad. The "lingering eyes" likely reflected the locals' fascination with the victorious "Desert Rats" who had just driven the Germans out of Africa.
- **Nostalgia:** With the adrenaline of combat gone, homesickness sets in. The "good coffee" and "beautiful girls" trigger memories of home (England) and the journey out (Durban).
- **Health:** The casual mention of "diarrhoea very bad" is a reminder that despite the "lovely" surroundings, the troops were still plagued by dysentery and stomach issues caused by poor sanitation and foreign bacteria.

Sunday, May 30, 1943

We should have found Gd but were let off again.

Went into Algiers about 1 P.M. Had good drink at W.O.'s & Sgts. Club with Harrison, Woodhouse, Hackling who had just come out. Day was very hot, but plenty shade & restaurants. Had first taste of champagne.

Back at camp about 9 P.M.

Monday, May 31, 1943

Scrubbed webbing & drew rations up for journey back to Bone.

Left camp at 2.30 P.M & caught train at 4.30. Thirty of us in a cattle truck, all kit & seven days rations. Not enough room even to sit down. Bit of a job making meals out.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Found Gd:** "Find Guard." To provide the personnel for a guard duty. Bernard was rostered to be the Guard Commander, but the duty was cancelled ("let off again").
- **W.O.'s & Sgts. Club: Warrant Officers' and Sergeants' Club**. A social venue strictly for senior NCOs (Sergeants and above). It offered better drinks and comfort than the canteens for the lower ranks.

- **Hackling / Woodhouse:** Fellow Sergeants. The phrase "who had just come out" implies they had recently arrived from the UK as reinforcements to replace the heavy casualties the battalion suffered in March and April.
- **Webbing:** The canvas belts, straps, and pouches used to carry ammunition and equipment. "Scrubbing webbing" (often with a colored paste called Blanco) was a standard preparation for moving or parades.
- **Cattle truck:** The infamous **"Hommes 40, Chevaux 8"** (40 Men, 8 Horses) boxcars used on French and North African railways. Cramming 30 men plus "all kit & seven days rations" into one of these unventilated wagons in the African heat was a notorious ordeal for Allied troops.

Historical Context

Champagne and Cattle Trucks
These entries perfectly capture the duality of a soldier's life: one day drinking champagne in a capital city, the next day being treated like livestock.

- **The New Arrivals:** Meeting "Hackling who had just come out" highlights the changing face of the battalion. Bernard and Harrison are now the "old hands"—veterans of the desert war. The arrival of fresh NCOs from England signals that the unit is being rebuilt and brought up to strength for the next campaign.
- **A Taste of Luxury:** Algiers was a world away from the front lines. Drinking **champagne** was a status symbol; it showed that the Allies had not only won the war in Africa but were enjoying the fruits of the French colonial lifestyle.
- **The Misery of Transport:** The journey back to Bone on May 31st is described in grueling terms. The rail network was overstretched. Seven days of rations implies a long, slow journey was expected. Being packed so tightly that there was "not enough room even to sit down" was physically exhausting, especially given the heat mentioned the previous day.
- **Strategic Movement:** Moving back to **Bone** (near the Tunisian border) suggests the battalion is moving to a training area to prepare for the amphibious invasion of Italy (Salerno), although at this stage, the soldiers likely did not know their next destination.

Tuesday, June 1, 1943

Hardly anybody slept at night so about eight decided they would sleep on top of truck.

Finished reading Richard Feverell. Very good book, but tragic finish.

Wednesday, June 2, 1943

Passed through Constantine & it looked a very impressive city.

Arrived at Bone at 10.30. Camp at 11.30. Drink of tea & bed.

For some reason, I couldnt sleep till about 2 A M.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Truck:** In this context, this refers to the **Railway Wagon** ("Cattle Truck") mentioned in the May 31st entry.
- **Sleep on top of truck:** Because the boxcars were overcrowded ("not enough room even to sit down") and hot, soldiers frequently climbed out and rode on the flat roofs of the train carriages. It was cooler and less smelly, though dangerous.
- **Richard Feverell:** A misspelling of *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, the 1859 novel by George Meredith that Bernard mentioned starting on the ship from Tunis (May 27).
- **Constantine:** A historic city in northeastern Algeria. It is famous for being built on a plateau bisected by a deep ravine, connected by dramatic bridges. It is a striking sight from the railway line.

Historical Context

The Railway Journey Across Algeria
These entries conclude the long transit from Algiers back to the unit's base area.

- **The "Hommes 40" Experience:** The misery of the train journey continues. The fact that men were willing to sleep on the roof of a moving train ("on top of truck") demonstrates just how unbearable the conditions were inside the overcrowded cattle wagons.
- **Sightseeing from the Rails:** Passing through **Constantine** was a highlight for many Allied soldiers traveling by train in North Africa. The city's dramatic geography made it one of the most memorable sights of the campaign, noted in many war diaries of the period.
- **Literary Escapism:** Finishing a Victorian tragedy (*Richard Feverel*) while riding on the roof of a cattle truck in Algeria is a quintessential snapshot of the soldier's experience—finding mental escape wherever possible.
- **Restlessness:** The final note about insomnia ("couldnt sleep till about 2 A M") despite being safe in camp might be a lingering effect of the adrenaline of the campaign, the discomfort of the journey, or the difficulty of adjusting to a non-combat rhythm.

Thursday, June 3, 1943

Had letter from Mother & Nora. Did expect more.

Washed clothes before lunch & had good swim afterwards.

Wrote to Nora & Mother.

Drink in Mess at night & to bed 10 P.M.

Friday, June 4, 1943

Mounted C. Qtr. Guard 9.30 A.M.

Very hot day & felt tired during afternoon, but better during evening.

Read from 10 P.M. to 2 A.M. slept till 5.30.

Dismounted 9.30 & went for swim before lunch. Lovely time.

Bed in afternoon & early night.

Wrote to John & Terry.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Mess:** The **Sergeants' Mess**.
- **Mounted:** To begin a period of guard duty.
- **C. Qtr. Guard: Company Quarter Guard**. This is a ceremonial and security guard detail assigned to the specific area ("quarter") where the Company is billeted. It is responsible for the security of the Company office, weapons, and discipline within the camp lines. It is a standard duty in a standing camp, distinct from a tactical frontline sentry.
- **Dismounted:** To end the shift of guard duty (usually 24 hours later).

Historical Context

Garrison Life in Algeria
These entries depict the return to the mundane routine of "peacetime" soldiering after the intensity of the Tunisian campaign.

- **Location:** Based on the previous entry (June 2), the battalion has arrived at **Bone** (Annaba) in Algeria. They are now in a transit or rest camp on the coast.
- **Routine and Rest:** The schedule has slowed down significantly. The activities are domestic: washing clothes, swimming (likely in the Mediterranean), reading late into the night, and drinking in the Mess. This period was essential for physical recovery after months of living in slit trenches and enduring the stress of combat.
- **Quarter Guard:** The mention of mounting a "Company Quarter Guard" signals that the battalion has returned to strict discipline. In the front line, guards are tactical (watching for the enemy). In a rear camp, Quarter Guards are about spit-and-polish, turnout, and internal security. It was a way for officers to re-instill formal discipline in troops who had become "rough" during the fighting.

- **The Weather:** The note "Very hot day" reminds us that summer has arrived in North Africa. June temperatures in Algeria frequently exceed 30°C (86°F), making guard duty in full uniform exhausting.

Saturday, June 5, 1943

Caught cold while swimming in evening, & had bottle of muscatel in Mess which cleared it.

Sunday, June 6, 1943

Confession & Comm. at 11.15 A.M.

Swim in afternoon & went with Mike Dunn to Cathedral of St. Augustine. Was Feast of St. Rita in which roses were blessed on altar & given to congregation. Cathedral beautiful inside. Lovely statue of Our Lady.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Muscatel:** A sweet, fortified wine made from muscat grapes. Algeria was a major wine producer under the French, and this would have been readily available and cheap. Bernard using it as a "cure" for a cold is a classic soldier's remedy.
- **Comm.: Holy Communion**.
- **Cathedral of St. Augustine:** This is the **Basilica of St. Augustine** in **Bone** (Annaba), Algeria. It is a magnificent church built on a hill overlooking the ruins of the ancient city of Hippo Regius, where Saint Augustine was bishop in the 5th Century.
- **Feast of St. Rita:** St. Rita of Cascia. Her traditional feast day is May 22nd, but the local church may have been celebrating it on a specific Sunday or holding a votive mass. The "Blessing of Roses" is a specific tradition associated with this saint (legend says roses bloomed in winter for her).
- **Mike Dunn:** A fellow soldier/friend.

Historical Context

The Saint on the Hill
These entries confirm the battalion's location and provide a glimpse into the cultural side of their stay in Algeria.

- **Location Confirmed:** The visit to the **Cathedral of St. Augustine** definitively places Bernard in **Bone** (Annaba). The basilica was a major landmark, completed in 1900, blending Roman, Byzantine, and Arab architectural styles. For a devout Catholic like Bernard, visiting the city of St. Augustine (one of the Doctors of the Church) would have been a significant spiritual pilgrimage.

- **Cultural Immersion:** The description of the "Feast of St. Rita" with the blessing of roses shows Bernard participating in the local French colonial religious customs. This ritual would have been quite different from the more reserved services in England.
- **Health and Recreation:** The diary has settled into a rhythm of "swimming," "mess," and "church." The mention of catching a cold from evening swimming suggests the weather, while hot in the day, could still be chilly at night or the water temperature was dropping. The "bottle of muscatel" cure highlights the availability of alcohol in the rear areas compared to the dry days in the desert.

Monday, June 7, 1943

Mounted Picquet 7.45.

Easy picquet, nothing much to do.

Tuesday, June 8, 1943

Came in for week

Had a tooth filled in Bone. Very good dentist.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Mounted Picquet:** To "mount" is to begin a duty shift. A "picquet" (or picket) is a military guard detail. Bernard was the commander of the guard for that 24-hour period.
- **Came in for week:** Ideally, this might read "Came in for *work*" (referring to the dental work), but the handwriting appears to spell "week." It implies he may have come into the town from the outlying camp for a week's duration, possibly for medical/dental treatment or a specific course.

Historical Context

Base Life and Dentistry
These brief entries reflect the mundane reality of life behind the lines after a campaign has finished.

- **The Pace of Peace:** The entry "Easy picquet, nothing much to do" stands in stark contrast to the frantic "stand-to" and shelling of the previous months. The battalion is in a secure rear area, and guard duty has become routine rather than a matter of life and death.
- **Medical Maintenance:** Soldiers in the desert suffered significantly from dental problems due to a diet of hardtack biscuits, sugary tea, and limited hygiene. Now that they were near a major base like **Bone**, men were sent to catch up on essential medical and dental

repairs before the next invasion. Finding a "Very good dentist" was a noteworthy event for a soldier used to rough field medicine.

Wednesday, June 9, 1943

C.O.’s Drill Pde.

Letter from home.

Thursday, June 10, 1943

Coy. out Trg.

Came back 3.30.

Swimming & lecture on pay by Qtr. Master.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **C.O.’s Drill Pde.: Commanding Officer’s Drill Parade**. A formal inspection and marching session overseen by the Battalion Commander. Even in a rest camp, the Guards maintained high standards of discipline through drill.
- **Trg.:** Abbreviation for **Training**.
- **Qtr. Master: Quartermaster** (often abbreviated as QM). The officer responsible for supplies, rations, clothing, and pay. A lecture on pay was likely to explain changes in rates, currency exchange (French Francs/British Military Authority notes), or savings schemes for soldiers sending money home.

Historical Context

The Routine of Refitting
These brief entries illustrate the "boring" side of war: the period between campaigns used for training and administration.

- **Garrison Duties:** The battalion is still stationed near **Bone** (Annaba), Algeria. With the fighting in Africa over and the invasion of Italy not yet launched, the troops were kept busy with a routine of physical training ("Coy. out Trg"), discipline ("Drill Pde"), and education ("lecture").
- **Pay and Administration:** The lecture on pay suggests the army was tidying up its administrative tail. During the chaos of the Tunisian campaign, pay parades were irregular. Now in a static camp, the bureaucracy of the army caught up with the men.

Friday, June 11, 1943

Coy. out training, but I stayed behind as we found duties next two days.

Saturday, June 12, 1943

Nothing outstanding happened during day.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Found duties:** A specific military phrase. To "find" duties means to supply the personnel required for camp maintenance and security (e.g., Guard duty, Fire Picket, Fatigue parties). Because Bernard's Company was scheduled to provide the manpower for these tasks ("duties") for the next 48 hours, they were excused from going out on the field training exercise. As a Sergeant, Bernard would be responsible for creating the roster and ensuring the men reported to their posts.

Historical Context

The Doldrums of War
These entries represent the quietest period in the diary so far.

- **The Lull:** After the intensity of the Mareth Line (March), Enfidaville (April), and the capture of Tunis (May), the battalion has settled into a period of profound inactivity in Algeria.
- **Garrison Life:** The entry "Nothing outstanding happened" is the soldier's classic lament of boredom. While preferable to being shelled, the monotony of camp life—training, cleaning kit, and mounting guard duties—often led to a dip in morale.
- **Strategic Pause:** The Allies were currently preparing for **Operation Husky** (the invasion of Sicily), which would launch in July. However, the Grenadier Guards were not destined for the first wave of that invasion. They were being held in reserve for the subsequent invasion of mainland Italy (Salerno) in September. Consequently, June 1943 was a month of waiting, recuperation, and routine administration.

Sunday, June 13, 1943

Routine W.

Monday, June 14, 1943

Routine W.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Routine W.:** Likely shorthand for **"Routine Work"** or possibly **"Routine Watch"**. Given the context of the previous days where the company "found duties" (guard/camp maintenance), this indicates a period of monotonous garrison activity with nothing significant to report.

Historical Context

The Long Wait
These minimalist entries are the shortest in the diary so far, illustrating the reality of the "hurry up and wait" nature of military life.

- **Static Warfare:** After the intense activity of the Tunisian campaign, the 6th Battalion is now firmly stuck in the doldrums of garrison life in Algeria. There are no battles, no moves, and apparently, no interesting trips to town to report.

Tuesday, June 15, 1943

Out of waiting at 1 P.M. Handed over to Dusty Smith.

Mounted Sub Area Gd. at 5.30 P.M.

Decent Gd. but no lamps.

Wednesday, June 16, 1943

Dismounted Gd. at 8 A.M. & to camp about 9 A.M.

Bn. should have found Guard of Honour, but postponed for 24 hrs.

Made remittance of £30 home.

Went for a swim in early afternoon with Harry Cosson & to town later & saw "Little Nelly Kelly".

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Out of waiting:** Likely refers to coming off "Waiting Man" duty. A "Waiting Man" is a soldier detailed to be ready immediately to replace a guard or perform a task if required. Bernard handed this duty over to "Dusty Smith" before taking up his main guard duty later in the day.
- **Dusty Smith:** A fellow NCO. (In the British Army, anyone with the surname Smith is nicknamed "Dusty").

- **Mounted / Dismounted:** Beginning and ending a guard duty shift.
- **Sub Area Gd.: Sub-Area Guard**. Guarding a specific administrative zone within the larger base at Bone.
- **No lamps:** A specific complaint for a night guard. Without paraffin/oil lamps, checking identity papers or writing the guard report in the dark would have been difficult and annoying.
- **Found Guard of Honour:** To "find" in military terms means to "supply." The Battalion was scheduled to provide the soldiers for a ceremonial parade.
- **Remittance:** An official transfer of pay from the soldier's account to his family in the UK.
    - *Context:* **£30** was a very large sum in 1943 (equivalent to over £1,000 today). It represents several months of saved pay, likely accumulated because there was nothing to spend money on in the desert and his recent promotion to Sergeant increased his wages.
- **Harry Cosson:** A fellow Sergeant and frequent companion in the diary.
- **"Little Nelly Kelly":** Refers to the 1940 musical film *Little Nellie Kelly* starring Judy Garland.

Historical Context

The King's Visit
These entries hint at a major VIP visit that was being kept secret for security reasons.

- **The Guard of Honour:** Bernard notes the Battalion was supposed to provide a Guard of Honour but it was "postponed." This ceremony was almost certainly for **King George VI**.
    - The King arrived in North Africa on June 12, 1943, for a tour of the victorious armies. He visited troops in Algeria and Tunisia under the codename "General Lyon." The postponement suggests the King's schedule changed or security concerns delayed his arrival at Bone.
- **Financial Responsibility:** Sending £30 home demonstrates the mindset of the wartime soldier. Having survived the campaign, Bernard is securing his financial future and supporting his family (likely his mother, who sent him the parcel).
- **Normalcy:** The diary reflects a stabilized routine. The juxtaposition of mounting military guards, managing finances, swimming with friends, and watching a Judy Garland movie shows a life that has returned to a relative "peace," albeit in a foreign country.

Thursday, June 17, 1943

Lined route for visit of King George to Bone. From 'Drome to town.

Same again in afternoon, but sun was much hotter.

Went for swim as soon as I got back.

Friday, June 18, 1943

P.T. & swimming in morning & on beach for rest of day.

Wrote to John, Mother, Anthony, & Ted Leake at night.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Lined route:** A ceremonial security duty. Instead of a static block of troops (like a Guard of Honour), soldiers are spaced out at regular intervals along both sides of a road to create a secure corridor for a VIP convoy to drive through. They present arms as the car passes.
- **'Drome:** Abbreviation for **Aerodrome** (Airfield). The King likely flew from Algiers to the airfield near Bone, then drove into the city.

Historical Context

The King in North Africa
The entry for June 17 confirms the VIP visit hinted at in the previous days' "postponements."

- **King George VI's Tour:** In June 1943, King George VI made a historic visit to North Africa (codenamed "General Lyon") to congratulate the victorious Allied troops. This was the first time a British monarch had flown into an active theatre of war since George V in WWI.
- **Regimental Pride:** As the **Colonel-in-Chief** of the Grenadier Guards, the King had a special connection to Bernard's regiment. "Lining the route" was a way for the 6th Battalion to pay respects to their sovereign.
- **The Route:** The specific detail "From 'Drome to town" indicates the King flew into the local airfield (likely Les Salines) and was driven into Bone to inspect the port or naval facilities. Standing in the African summer sun in full wool dress uniform for hours ("Same again in afternoon") would have been grueling, explaining Bernard's urgent need for a swim immediately afterward.
- **Rest and Recovery:** The entry for Friday is essentially a holiday. Spending the entire day "on beach" shows that the battalion was in a full relaxation mode, recovering from the campaign and building strength for the future invasion of Italy.

Saturday, June 19, 1943

C.O.'s tent inspection. Coy well turned out.

On beach for rest of day.

Went out to the Cathedral for Rosary. Back by 9.0 P.M.

Sunday, June 20, 1943

Camp Qtr. Gd 9.30 A.M. with Green.

Very hot day & I felt stiff from swimming. Was glad when cool of evening came.

Read "Random Harvest". Good book, but hard to link up in parts.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **C.O.'s tent inspection: Commanding Officer's Tent Inspection**. A formal review where the Battalion Commander inspects the tidiness, cleanliness, and layout of the soldiers' sleeping quarters. This type of "bull" (strict discipline) is typical of garrison life to keep troops disciplined when not fighting.
- **Well turned out:** A military phrase meaning the unit looked smart, uniforms were clean, and equipment was properly presented.
- **Camp Qtr. Gd: Camp Quarter Guard**. The ceremonial and security guard detail for the battalion's specific camp lines.
- **Green:** A fellow soldier.
- **"Random Harvest":** A 1941 novel by James Hilton (which was made into a popular film in 1942). The plot revolves around a shell-shocked WWI veteran with amnesia trying to piece together his lost years. Bernard's comment that it was **"hard to link up in parts"** is an astute literary critique—the book relies on complex flashbacks and a non-linear timeline which can be confusing.

Historical Context

The Return of Discipline
These entries reinforce the transition from a combat unit to an occupation force.

- **Spit and Polish:** The "Tent Inspection" is a sign that the Grenadier Guards were returning to their peacetime standards. In the desert, living in holes in the ground, inspections were about weapon functionality. Now, in a camp in Algeria, they were about neatness and uniformity.
- **Religious Life:** Bernard returns to the **Cathedral of St. Augustine** in Bone for the Rosary, continuing the pattern of his faith being a central pillar of his off-duty life.
- **Cultural Connection:** Reading *Random Harvest* connects Bernard to the popular culture of the home front. It is poignant that a soldier in WWII is reading a novel about the trauma and amnesia of a soldier from WWI, perhaps reflecting on the "shaky" feelings he himself experienced after the Mareth Line battles.

Monday, June 21, 1943

Off guard & went for a swim which I enjoyed.

Went out with R.A.F. in afternoon to village on top of mountain. 2,500 ft. up. Lovely women & wine. Only stayed 3/4 hour then back to R.A.F. camp & had dinner.

Tuesday, June 22, 1943

Inlying Pic. with Cpl. Carter. Didnt do much & on bathing picquet from 4 – 7 P.M.

Lovely swim & saw football match later. Bn. lost 6-1.

Mr. Wiggin Pic. officer. Some very good officers in Coy now.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **R.A.F.: Royal Air Force**. The army and air force often shared facilities in rear areas like Bone.
- **Inlying Pic.: Inlying Picquet**. A detachment of troops held in readiness inside the camp to deal with emergencies (fire, disorder) or to reinforce the main guard if necessary.
- **Cpl.: Corporal**.
- **Bathing picquet:** A specific guard detail assigned to the beach. Their job was to ensure safety (lifeguard duty) and security (preventing soldiers from wandering off or interacting with locals in unauthorized areas) while the troops swam.
- **Bn.: Battalion**. The football score suggests an inter-unit match, perhaps against the RAF or another regiment.
- **Mr. Wiggin:** **Lieutenant William H.C. Wiggin**. In the Foot Guards, Ensigns and Lieutenants are traditionally referred to and addressed as "Mr [Surname]" by senior NCOs, rather than by their rank. Lieutenant Wiggin would later be awarded the Military Cross (MC) for bravery in Italy.
- **Pic. officer: Picquet Officer**. The officer in charge of the guard detail.

Historical Context

The Mountain Village and the New Officers
These entries show the battalion fully settled into a routine of rest and integration of new leadership.

- **The Village in the Clouds:** The "village on top of mountain" near Bone (Annaba) is almost certainly **Séraïdi** (known as **Bugeaud** during the French colonial era). It sits in the Edough Massif at an altitude of roughly 850 meters (approx. 2,800 ft), overlooking the coast. It was a popular summer retreat for French colonists to escape the heat of the plains, which explains the presence of "lovely women & wine."

- **Rebuilding the Chain of Command:** Bernard's comment *"Some very good officers in Coy now"* is significant. Throughout the diary, he has been critical of some officers (Capt. Thorne) and had to take command himself when others were killed. The arrival of capable new subalterns like "Mr. Wiggin" indicates that the battalion has successfully integrated its reinforcements. The veterans (like Bernard) are finally beginning to trust the new leadership that will take them into Italy.

Wednesday, June 23, 1943

N.C.O.s out with Capt. Thorne on a T.E.W.T. Very easy morning.

Clear afternoon, which I spent in swimming.

Thursday, June 24, 1943

Swim before Bk.fast & as it was calm, had long swim.

Sent on patrols.

Out to Morris after dinner looking round P.O.W camp for future ref.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **N.C.O.s: Non-Commissioned Officers** (Sergeants and Corporals).
- **T.E.W.T.: Tactical Exercise Without Troops**. A standard military training method where officers and NCOs go out onto the ground to plan battles and discuss tactics theoretically, without having to maneuver actual soldiers. It allows leaders to practice decision-making.
- **Bk.fast:** Breakfast.
- **Morris:** Camp name or location.
- **Future ref.: Future Reference**. Bernard's interest in the layout of the P.O.W. camp suggests he was studying it professionally—either to understand how to guard prisoners better or perhaps thinking ahead to how defensive perimeters are set up.

Historical Context

Schooling for the Next War
These entries highlight the focus on training and professional development during the summer lull of 1943.

- **Training the Leaders:** The use of **T.E.W.T.s** is significant. The 6th Battalion had lost many of its junior officers and senior NCOs during the Tunisian campaign. The summer

break in Algeria was being used to intensively train the survivors (like Bernard) and the replacements in tactics before they were thrown into the complex terrain of Italy.
- **The Calm of the Med:** The recurring mention of "swimming" and "calm" seas paints a picture of an idyllic Mediterranean summer. For these soldiers, this was the eye of the storm—a brief period of physical restoration between the desert war they had just won and the mountain war in Italy that was to come.

Friday, June 25, 1943

Reported sick & had treatment for my ears.

Scrubbed webbing for rest of morning.

On beach most of the afternoon.

Saturday, June 26, 1943

Moved up to P.O.W. site at 9.0 A.M. by truck.

Place full of grass-hoppers & quite a few mosquitoes.

Had cooked supper of bacon & tomatoes.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Reported sick:** Going to the Medical Officer (M.O.) during the dedicated "sick parade" time in the morning.
- **Treatment for my ears:** Likely **Otitis Externa** (Swimmer's Ear). Given the daily swimming entries over the past few weeks, an ear infection would be a common ailment.
- **Webbing:** The canvas harness system worn by soldiers to carry ammunition and water. Scrubbing it was a standard preparation for a move or inspection.
- **P.O.W. site:** A designated area for holding Prisoners of War.
- **Grass-hoppers:** Likely **Locusts**, which are common in North Africa and can appear in massive swarms during the summer.

Historical Context

Pests and P.O.W.s
These entries illustrate the environmental annoyances of the North African summer.

- **Nature's War:** The mention of the campsite being "full of grass-hoppers & quite a few mosquitoes" highlights the constant battle against nature. While the fighting had

stopped, the insects remained. Mosquitoes posed a malaria risk, while large locusts (grasshoppers) were a nuisance that got into food, bedding, and equipment.
- **Dietary Improvements:** A "cooked supper of bacon & tomatoes" sounds simple, but for a soldier who had lived on bully beef and biscuits for months, fresh tomatoes and cooked bacon were significant luxuries. It suggests the supply chain in the rear area (Algeria) was functioning well, bringing fresh produce to the troops.

Sunday, June 27, 1943

Very easy day.

Very hot in afternoon.

Monday, June 28, 1943

Treatment for ears again. L. ear has small boil in it.

Tea issued five times a day while we are up here.

Sand-fly, mosquitoes, locusts, & everything that crawls or jumps is in this camp.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **L. ear: Left ear**. This relates to the "treatment for my ears" mentioned on June 25th, likely an infection caused by the daily swimming.
- **Sand-fly:** Tiny, biting flies common in North Africa and the Mediterranean. They are a significant nuisance to soldiers as they can transmit "Sandfly fever" (Pappataci fever), a debilitating viral disease.
- **Locusts:** The "grass-hoppers" mentioned in the previous entry.
- **Tea issued five times a day:** In the British Army, tea was the universal panacea. Issuing it five times a day suggests the command was trying to ensure the men stayed hydrated in the "Very hot" weather, or simply trying to keep morale up in a camp infested with pests.

Historical Context

The Plague of Pests
These entries highlight the environmental misery of the North African summer.

- **A Biblical Plague:** Bernard’s description of "Sand-fly, mosquitoes, locusts, & everything that crawls or jumps" vividly conveys the reality of living in a tented camp in Algeria in June. While the enemy had surrendered, nature was still attacking. The heat and insects made rest difficult and increased the risk of disease.

- **Medical Issues:** The recurrence of the ear problem ("small boil") shows the minor but persistent health issues that plagued troops. Without antibiotics (penicillin was not yet widely available for minor infections), a simple boil could become a serious issue, requiring daily attendance at the medical tent.

Tuesday, June 29, 1943

Still sick with ear.

99 of Bn. in hospital with Malaria. Everyone taking a tablet a day as measures against it.

Wednesday, June 30, 1943

P.T. 8.15 – 9 A.M.

Letter from John, Mother & Ted Leake.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **Tablet a day:** This refers to **Mepacrine** (also known as Atebrin). It was the standard anti-malarial drug used by the British Army in WWII. It was famous for its bitter taste and for turning the soldiers' skin a sickly shade of yellow.

Historical Context

The War Against the Mosquito
These entries highlight a critical but often overlooked aspect of the war: disease.

- **A Battalion Crippled:** The statistic **"99 of Bn. in hospital with Malaria"** is staggering. A standard infantry battalion had a strength of roughly 800–900 men. Having nearly 100 men hospitalized simultaneously meant the battalion had lost more than a full company's worth of manpower to a mosquito bite. This casualty rate was almost as high as some of the battles they had fought.
- **The Enfidaville Legacy:** This outbreak was likely the delayed result of their time in the marshy positions at Enfidaville and the "P.O.W. site" full of insects mentioned in late April and May. Malaria has an incubation period, so the men bitten weeks ago were now falling ill in droves.
- **Mandatory Mepacrine:** The order for "Everyone taking a tablet a day" was strictly enforced. Officers and NCOs (like Bernard) often had to watch their men swallow the pills to ensure they weren't spitting them out, as the side effects (nausea and yellow skin) made them unpopular.

- **End of June:** This entry closes out June 1943. The battalion has spent the entire month in a state of limbo—training, guarding prisoners, and battling disease—while waiting for the next phase of the war (the invasion of Italy) to begin.

Thursday, July 1, 1943

Felt ill all day, especially during the late evening. Very weak & sore ear.

Friday, July 2, 1943

Moved back to camp from Morris, by order of M.O. I was as pleased as anyone, as I had felt ill ever since we moved to Morris.

Glossary & Military Jargon

- **M.O.: Medical Officer**. The battalion doctor. He had the authority to order troops to move if a location was deemed a health hazard (e.g., due to a malaria outbreak).
- **Morris:** This refers back to the entry on **June 24**, where Bernard went "Out to Morris... looking round P.O.W. camp." It appears "Morris" was the name given to a specific sector of the P.O.W. camp or a satellite camp (possibly named after an officer in charge, or a local landmark). It was evidently a distinctive location separate from the main battalion camp.
- **Sore ear:** A recurring ailment for Bernard (mentioned June 25, June 28, June 29), likely an infection exacerbated by swimming or the unsanitary conditions.

Historical Context

Retreat from the Mosquitoes
These entries show the battalion losing the battle against disease in the Algerian summer.

- **The Sickness spreads:** On June 29, Bernard noted that 99 men were in the hospital with malaria. Now, he is succumbing to illness himself ("Very weak"). Whether it is malaria, sandfly fever, or a severe infection from his ear, the health of the unit is degrading.
- **Medical Intervention:** The move "by order of M.O." is significant. It suggests that the "Morris" site (likely near the marshy ground mentioned in previous entries about mosquitoes and locusts) was identified as a disease hotspot. The medical staff likely ordered the evacuation of that specific site to prevent the entire battalion from becoming unfit for duty right before the invasion season.
- **Morale:** Bernard's admission that he was "pleased as anyone" to leave shows how miserable the conditions at the P.O.W. guard site had become.